ONSLAUGHT

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

https://archive.org/details/onslaught0000joan

ONSLAUGHT

BY

JOAN SUTHERLAND

Author of "Challenge," "Unquenchable Fire," etc.

CASSELL AND COMPANY, LTD
London, Toronto, Melbourne and Sydney

First Published 1927

Printed in Great Britain.

To

THE UNDYING MEMORY OF

WILLIAM CRAWFORD GORGAS

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR IN GRATITUDE FOR HIS HELP AND HIS GREAT KINDNESS, AND IN PROFOUND ADMIRATION OF HIS NOBLE WORK FOR HUMANITY.

ONSLAUGHT

CHAPTER I

"The 4th Battalion is being moved back to Havana to-morrow . . . any more leave-passes to sign for the boat, sir?"

The speaker did not look up, he was busy filling in a list of names, and his chief was equally absorbed in the papers that lay before him, although he answered at once.

"No. None. We can't let any more men go, the quota is complete for this trip."

Jardine, military secretary to the man who was in a few years destined to become one of the greatest saviours of mankind, William Crawford, heard the quietly spoken words with something like dismay, even though he had expected them.

"I don't know how they'll stand it. They're getting desperate. They could forget the yellow fever while they were fighting, but now the Spaniards have given in—why, they're going down in heaps."

Crawford pushed aside the papers he had been studying and looked across at his secretary.

"Yes. I know it. The poor boys. But it has to be faced. Orders must be obeyed and until the regiments are recalled they must stay, cruel as it seems. By the way, who is your senior captain?"

"Man named Lionel Kent."

"Satisfactory?"

"First-rate. He's not the type to fail, even in a tight place like this."

The elder man made a sign of approval.

"Good. There's a second Kent, isn't there? I had him here with malaria a week or two back."

"That's a brother, a subaltern."

"He struck me as being a bad subject for this kind of thing," Crawford said meditatively, "highly strung, imaginative. But he showed no sign of letting his nerves get the better of him."

"He did finely on the field," Jardine answered, wondering why his chief was interested. "Here's the completed list, sir. Pretty bad, isn't it?"

Crawford ran his eye down the page.

"Worse than that," he said, and checked a sigh as the other man rose. "I shall want you at ten, Jardine," and as the door closed and he was left alone, he went to the window, and stood looking

down into the narrow street—a street picturesque, dirty, old, shabby, with a glimpse above a broken roof of the thick green of the jungle which crowded about this little port of Siboney; the jungle in which lurked hidden death more hideous than that of bullet or shell-splinter.

Major William Crawford, of the U.S. Army Medical Service, commanding the base hospital at Siboney, was in no enviable position. Two months' campaigning in tropical jungle had reduced a splendid little fighting force of sixteen thousand men to a shadow of its former self. During the campaign, despite hardship, stifling heat, and fighting under extreme difficulty, the men had done finely, but now, the Spanish surrender a thing of the past, a reaction had set in, and the disease which they could ignore while fighting began its work of demoralization. Malaria was rampant, but the dreaded scourge of yellow fever was the thing that threatened the morale of the troops, the yellow fever that struck down in hundreds, against which clean blood, good health, medical skill, were no defence.

Men died in hundreds and died hideously; no one could help, and under the strain the backbone of the troops was breaking. Every time a ship called men were sent home, and it had come now to such a pass that only the courage and staying power of a few held the many from hysterical panic.

Day by day the disease claimed fresh victims, and it was understood now that no officers must avail themselves of their leave passes.

Major Crawford, a Southerner, and a man who hid beneath great gentleness of manner and kindliness of heart the courage of a lion and the staying power of a Hercules, was bending all his knowledge and skill to the handling of a desperate situation and the discovery of its cause.

He realized the danger and the tremendous strain under which the men were living; but it was impossible for all the troops to leave, and he himself was anxious to get to Havana, the hotbed of yellow fever, and undertake a campaign against a disease that was still believed to be one arising from filthy conditions. For the moment he was kept in Siboney, selecting the men who were to stay on in Cuba or return to the States, and the task was peculiarly trying to a man of Crawford's sympathetic and understanding nature.

Jardine, meanwhile, had made his way to the house where his Colonel was lodging, had handed in the papers Crawford had signed, and, on his way back to his own quarters, stumbled in the darkness and violently knocked into a man coming in the opposite direction.

"What the devil——!"

The exclamation was simultaneous from them

both; there was a hasty apology and Jardine struck a match.

"Out on the loose, Kent? Found a pretty Spaniard?"

The other man, a year or two his junior, laughed rather shortly.

"No. Too busy. There are five fresh cases in the battalion, and I have just notified Doctor Loretto."

Jardine whistled.

"Five? My God! And the battalion is being moved back to Havana to-morrow."

"Yes, poor devils. There's a boat leaving to-morrow midnight, isn't there? Can we get young Hackett on board? He's all to pieces."

"She's nearly full. Do my best. Good night." And Jardine went on, leaving Lionel Kent to cross the uneven dirty street and enter his own lodgings in a ramshackle house close by the barracks.

He had letters to write for the homeward mail, and now that his battalion was to be moved to Havana, instead of taking its hoped-for departure from Cuba altogether, there were certain details with regard to business that had to be attended to before the sailing of to-morrow's mail.

He had just finished the last letter and was addressing its envelope, when the door was flung violently open and as violently closed, and start-

ing up he checked the indignant exclamation on his lips, for the young man who stood leaning back against the panels, white-faced, breathing unsteadily, was his brother.

For a second the two men faced one another, then Lionel got to his feet.

"You—what's the matter?"

He spoke quietly, but his heart missed a beat —this younger brother of his was the dearest thing on earth to him, and the times were such that at any moment death might lay his hand upon the shoulder.

The younger man did not answer for a moment, then he moistened his lips and jerked out his words:

"Is it true that the battalion is being moved to-morrow to Havana?"

"I believe so. Why?"

"Then I'm going home—I'm going to get away from this damned charnel-house. I'm going home. I've got to—I must!"

His voice rose dangerously, and the other man went across to a cupboard, took out brandy and soda, poured out a stiff dose, and handed the glass over.

"Drink that and sit down," he said. "We all want to go home, but the quota is complete for the boat sailing to-morrow. No officers can go."

The spirit had steadied the younger Kent, so that he could command his voice, but his words were the same as though he had not even heard what the other said.

"I'm going home," he repeated, "I've got to. I must."

"Afraid?"

The word cut the air like a sword-thrust, but Robert did not heed its contempt.

"Yes—yes—I am afraid! I admit it! I can't stand any more—I can't wait to die like all the other poor devils—I won't—I'm going—and if I don't, I'll shoot myself——"

That hysterical rise was back in the last words, and Robert was on his feet, shaking, ashen, gone to pieces utterly—a young man who had never flinched under fire or whined at hardship, but whose nerve had completely broken down before the onslaught of the hideous disease that was wiping out the troops, threatening to exterminate them as it had exterminated the French in Haiti just one hundred years ago.

Robert's voice, harsh and urgent, broke in upon the elder man's thoughts.

"After all, why not? The leave-passes have been issued."

"They can't be used by officers. What about the example to the men?"

"They have been—one or two."

"At the cost of a wrecked career—of being branded by those who know, as cowards. As long as we can't all go, the decent men won't try."

"So they'll stay here and rot! God! What an end! I tell you I can't—if I don't get away I'll make an end of it . . . there are other ways. These fellows here will do anything for money."

"You'd bolt?"

"I'd do anything. Anything, I tell you—I won't stay. I won't die in that filth——"

A vague feeling of physical sickness came over the elder man; panic that wipes out all decency, all self-respect, is an ugly thing to see, and this man was his brother and had been a gallant youngster; his face grim, he stood there, considering, weighing the chance of a scheme that had come into his mind. Robert was young, too young to wreck his life and too young to bear the strain that had been put upon it. He was in love—had he not spoken rather shyly of the charming French girl Simone de Melancourt? If he, Lionel, had Robert's pass signed in the wrong name who would be the wiser? Who on the boat would know that the brothers had changed places? The battalion was being moved back to Havana on the morrow. Jardine and Crawford would remain at Siboney.

In the confusion and horror of the time they would not be likely to discover that Robert had gone on his brother's pass; and he, Lionel, could keep well out of their way.

It was disgrace, but better himself than Robert . . . he could bear the result and fight his way through life, but Robert would be broken, ruined . . . After an appreciable pause he spoke.

"Have you got your pass on you?"

Robert looked up.

"Yes. Why?"

"Give it to me. I'll see what I can do to get it signed. You understand, if I do, it means you are finished?"

Amazed, half comprehending, Robert handed it over, and the other buckled on his belt, took his cap and went to the door.

"Wait there till I come back," he said curtly, and went out into the darkness.

The smell of the tropic night was heavy, the perfume of flowers and the stink of rank vegetation mingling with the foulness of the narrow streets, but to Lionel Kent all was familiar, and the silver light in the sky, which heralded the rising moon, drew his attention from the uneven road, the blank walls of the houses and the likelihood of stepping into an open drain. There was the sharp outline of a roof, ramshackle in the daylight but now

a curving line of beauty, and the serrated leaves of a palm tree, silhouetted blackly against that ever-deepening radiance, and Kent, deeply appreciative of such an effect, noted it with a pleasure that even his errand could not quite destroy.

It was only a couple of hundred yards to Major Crawford's quarters, and he made short work of it, was admitted without delay, and was greeted in some surprise by Jardine.

"Hullo, Kent! You here? Sit down." But Kent ignored the invitation.

"I want my leave-pass countersigned for the boat to-morrow," he said abruptly. "I can't stand this any longer."

Jardine started up, his expression one of blank amazement.

"What? You can't? You? What the hell do you mean?"

"What I say. I can't stand it. I won't. If you don't sign this I'll get away without it"—queer how easy it was to echo Robert's words, even his tone—"I can face gunfire—I can't face this. I won't."

Jardine stared unbelievingly, but Kent made no attempt to withdraw his words, and: "So you want to join the quitters, do you?" he said at last, subsiding into his chair. "I'm damned if I'd have believed it of you."

"I want my pass signed," Kent repeated doggedly. "Will you ask Major Crawford to do it?"

Jardine's heavy rubicund face showed a lively change of expression, amazement, unbelief, contempt.

"You realize you're wrecking your career?"

Lionel was silent, hanging on to the memory of Robert's face, Robert's future; and after a pause Jardine got up, went to the inner door, knocked and entered the room, and after a brief moment returned.

"Come in," he said curtly, and Kent entered, avoided the eyes of the man at the table and waited as Jardine spoke.

"This is Captain Kent, sir. He wishes his leave-pass signed by you. You remember I was speaking of him to you an hour or so ago?"

"Yes," Crawford said quietly, "I remember. Has he asked to be sent home?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your opinion?"

Jardine cast a glance at Kent.

"I should send him, sir," he said, and his voice was as contemptuous as his look. "If we don't, he may disgrace the regiment. We can't afford that."

Again Crawford looked at Kent, and this time he spoke directly to him.

"Do you realize what you are doing, Captain Kent?" he said. "That you—an officer—are setting a shameful example to your men? Are proving yourself a coward in time of danger as surely as if you deserted on the field?"

Kent's face was ashen; twice he moistened his dry lips and tried to speak. The third time he succeeded.

"Yes, sir."

"And you still ask to go?"

"Yes, sir."

Crawford held out his hand for the pen Jardine put into it, stooped and wrote his name on the slip of paper that lay on the table and handed it to Kent, who saluted, turned on his heel and went out of the room, and as he closed the door Crawford spoke very quietly.

"Jardine—what a pity. . . ."

CHAPTER II

The afternoon sun was beating down on the windows of a bare, white-washed room in Las Animas Hospital in Havana, where a little group of men were listening to a broad-shouldered, lean man with blue eyes, whose tanned skin looked very dark in conjunction with his nearly white hair and moustache.

"It will be necessary to call for volunteers and I propose with your permission, sir"—he bowed to the man at his right, General Leonard Wood, the Governor—"to call for them. Everyone here knows now that Doctor Carroll has been in danger of his life from allowing the infected stegomyia mosquito to bite him, and that Doctor Lazear"—his quiet voice deepened a note—"has died of yellow fever from the same cause . . . a martyr to the welfare not only of our nation but of the world. It is not yet determined how soon, after biting an infected person, the mosquito itself becomes harmful; Doctor Lazear was bitten on September 13th, was taken sick on the 18th, and died on September 25th. Previously, on August

16th, he had been experimentally bitten by a mosquito, which ten days before had bitten a yellow fever patient on the fifth day of the disease, with no ill effects. We know, therefore, the times were wrong, and we need further experiments to discover when the mosquito is infected and when she can infect in her turn. In my mind, and, I believe, in yours, it is definitely established that the stegomyia is the means of transmitting the disease, but it is still uncertain how long is the time of extrinsic incubation. It is also necessary, in my opinion, and, I think, in yours, gentlemen, to establish absolute proof that yellow fever is not conveyed by contagion either with clothes or persons; but that for the moment can wait until we have carried out the experiments we have now decided upon."

The speaker sat down amidst a little murmur of assent from the other three, and General Wood, after a minute, rose to his feet.

"I may say at once, gentlemen, that I heartily endorse everything Major Crawford has said, and since Doctor Reed, in consultation with him, has outlined the course he expects to pursue, and I am entirely satisfied with it, I propose to authorize the expenditure from Cuban funds of a sufficient sum to carry on the work, and give the Reed Board ample powers as to the

method of application. I am aware that the Board came to Cuba for entirely different investigations; I am aware, also, that it has been severely hampered through lack of funds; but since it is devoting itself to a cause that is not only that of science but of humanity, I am determined to assist it in its fine and self-sacrificing work by every means in my power. The advantage to the world will, if we can establish the fact that yellow fever is conveyed by the stegomyia mosquito, be incalculable, but useless unless we know when, and for how long, the stegomyia becomes infectious. You have, gentlemen, not only my warmest congratulations upon the work you have already done and will do, but my help and my influence, such as it is, to the utmost of my ability."

Interest had been expected from those men who knew the Governor, but aid so sincere and generous was more than they had hoped for.

Trained in the first instance as a medical man himself, Leonard Wood knew the value of the services that these heroic and self-sacrificing men were giving to the world; he had been intensely interested in the discoveries of the English army doctor, Ronald Ross, who had first experimented in India in 1897 with the anopheles mosquito and its connexion with malaria; and now that he was in a position as Governor to help forward

the work of tropical research in medicine, he was determined to do so to the utmost of his powers.

This particular afternoon the meeting had begun more or less formally, but now that Crawford as chief health officer had spoken, and the Governor had so cordially offered his help, the real discussion began.

A test had already been started near Camp Columbia in an isolated place well separated from other dwellings; it was kept under military guard. Dr. Reed had cognizance of everyone who entered or left it, and he now made his report as to his work there, as well as his proposals for further experiments.

"As you know, gentlemen, I have had at Camp Columbia a small frame-house built and tightly screened, divided into two compartments down the middle, and well ventilated. Two immunes were placed in this building, living and sleeping there, and thus demonstrating that there was no possibility of infection being conveyed by the air and being in the building.

"After several days I put fifteen infected stegomyia in one of the rooms, having a man in with them for thirty minutes. The room thus became infected, and three times on that day and the next the man was bitten seven times, five times, three times. On Christmas Day, which was the fourth day, he was down with yellow fever, and the

man who had lived and slept close by him, separated only by wire netting, remained perfectly well.

"Later, I caught all the infected stegomyia and thus disinfected the room.

"This, gentleman, has, I believe, made a profound impression; but while it has convinced the many that the female stegomyia carries yellow fever, it has not done away with the theory that the soiled clothes and bedding, etc., of yellow-fever patients can also convey the disease.

"To combat that I have had another house built—it has practically no ventilation, it contains material from Las Animas Hospital. I propose to subject volunteers to the severest tests of contagion within it, and in the next room Doctor Cook, one of our Army doctors, has already volunteered, and another man is waiting to come forward. With your permission, I should like to ask him to come in and explain to him the precise nature of the test."

There was a general assent. The time was one of intense interest, the need for help extreme. Dr. Reed gave his order, and a servant came back, ushering into the room a man in a rough flannel shirt and khaki shorts who glanced neither to right nor left, but took the place Dr. Reed indicated and waited in silence.

Major Crawford, turning over some papers as he entered, leaned forward to see what manner of man this volunteer was, and, seeing, checked a

start and frowned intently. He had expected a Spaniard or Cuban, but this man was neither. He was of good height with powerful shoulders, stood easily, and seemed to be listening to Dr. Reed's explanation with some degree of indifference. Suddenly, disturbed perhaps by the elder man's perplexed and intent regard, he looked up and their eyes met, and into the habitual pallor of his face came a dull slow red, and his eyes, light and steely, hardened till they looked like ice.

Dr. Reed, asking a direct question, caused him to turn his gaze away from Major Crawford, who pushed the papers aside and listened to the interview with the deepest interest.

"Your name, I see, is Lionel Kent, formerly Captain in the United States Army, now retired. Is that so?"

Kent made a brief sign of assent.

"And you are a resident in Cuba?"

"I have just returned here."

"From the States, Captain Kent?"

"Yes."

Dr. Reed nodded.

"You have never had yellow fever, I understand, and you are willing to be experimented upon. It is a fine thing you are doing, Captain Kent, but I want to make quite certain that you realize its danger. May I ask if you are married?"

Kent shook his head.

"No—and I believe I understand the position quite clearly."

"The test I wish to put is highly unpleasant."

"I am aware of that," his tone was faintly ironical. "Need we discuss it? I am healthy, clean-blooded. I am financially independent and my affairs concern nobody but myself. I am absolutely ready for any test you care to make."

Dr. Reed glanced round the table

"That is highly satisfactory I think, gentlemen. Captain Kent, we appreciate your courage more highly than we can properly express. My experiment is ready. May I ask you to come with me?"

A little way from the main building stood a small newly-erected house and outside it Dr. Reed paused.

"Doctor Cook—Captain Kent—I shall require you to sleep in this house for twenty nights. It is ventilated only just sufficiently for life. The mattresses are those upon which yellow-fever patients have recently died, and are stained and soiled by both their excreta and the black vomit that characterizes the disease; the pillows are in the same condition. The pyjamas were worn by them at the time of their death. You know enough of the peculiar symptoms of the disease to realize the unspeakable state of these things that you are required to use."

Major Crawford looked across at Kent while Dr.

Reed was speaking. It seemed to him incredible that this man whom he had last seen two years ago, hysterical with the fear of catching yellow fever, should now be deliberately walking into infection and subjecting himself with the utmost calm to an experience not only revolting but possibly of extreme and prolonged danger. His own experience as a doctor, and his singularly keen yet sympathetic insight into the souls of his fellow-creatures, had long since taught him how strange and inexplicable the course of human action can be, how intricate the motives that direct it, and it was possible that some trick of brain or some altered state of health had brought this man back to within a few miles of the scene of his disgrace in the endeavour to wipe that stain out.

He wondered where Kent had been, when he retired from the Army—his Colonel had died of the fever a few days after the Battalion had been moved to Havana—and what his occupation had been; in his own mind he believed that contagion was not possible even from the articles within that close, hot room, but such a belief was not yet a proven fact, and Kent was to be one of the first volunteers to supply that proof. If he survived the ordeal it would be interesting to discover his real motives. Acting on a kindly impulse he moved to his side and spoke his name.

"Captain Kent, I am glad to see you again in circumstances that do you great honour."

Kent, who was just going to the door, stopped as if he had been shot, and for an instant, as their eyes met, his face paled, then something in the elder man's keen yet kindly gaze softened him.

"Thank you, sir," he said very quietly, and followed Dr. Reed into the appalling stench of the polluted room.

The theory held by the heroic little group of doctors and surgeons serving in Havana was proved beyond further argument by the result of that twenty days' experiment from which the volunteers emerged healthy, despite their hideous ordeal, and perfectly free from any trace of fever.

The articles used by them in an atmosphere calculated to encourage all possible infection had been so contaminated, had contagion been possible, that not one of the men who joined Dr. Cook and Lionel Kent could possibly have escaped; but as it was, the stegomyia, and the stegomyia only, had been proved to carry infection by injecting poison into the blood of the victim, and a great stride onward had been made in the conquest of the disease.

To Kent the ordeal had given a grim satisfaction, but, once free of it, he avoided Major Crawford and as soon as possible took his passage for home.

CHAPTER III

The early spring dusk was falling over a countryside that for the last few weeks had shivered before a bitter north-east wind; but to-night the wind had dropped, the air, though keen, had not the savage cold of other nights, and the sky, no longer steely grey, showed a band of primrose in the west, melting to a clear, translucent green, that in turn changed to a deep sapphire. The stars were visible, and in the south-east a crescent moon hung like a sickle of pale silver, reflected in the river that wound through the silent meadows. In the cottages, blinds were drawn and windows showed as squares of orange light across which familiar shadows flitted, but the Manor House of Great Arrowden had its lower windows still unblinded, since its mistress had a liking for the skies of early evening.

The house, three-storied, and spacious, its beautiful proportions hardly noticeable in the dusk, was of the period of early Queen Anne, its walls faded to that mélange of red and yellow that makes old brick so exquisite; but to-night

the colour was invisible and the house appeared as a mass of darkness, more opaque than the darkness of the leafless trees, save where the unblinded windows showed red and orange from the firelight within.

Somewhere in the back regions was the stable-yard bounded by stables and coach-house and the high wall of the kitchen garden, and here, at all events, was life and movement. The door of the harness room stood open, showing an enticing interior of lamp-light and the glow from a little stove of red-hot coals twinkling from shining brass and steel and highly-polished leather; and to and fro before the doorway, through the open doors of the nag-stables, to the pump and to the bins where the feed was kept, stable-lads worked, and a young groom, whistling, was in the stables harnessing a pair of upstanding bay cobs.

The gay whistle, the clatter of pails, the stamp of hoofs, and the occasional: "Come over, there!" from some invisible worker within the stables themselves, had a cheery sound wholly pleasant to the ear; giving a sense of security and home, of life lived in a world at once serene and well-ordered. To the man who came through a door in one wall, and stood for a minute to light a cigarette, the every-day homely sounds, the clear sky with its pale afterglow, the sharp stillness of the air, the

whole was satisfying and very dear; all the more precious in that it was so soon to be a thing of the past, to be exchanged for a *local* dreaded and hated, a work carried on in surroundings that must always bring back to vivid life a memory of shame and bitter regret.

He stood there a moment, seeing, hearing all these dearly-loved familiar simple sounds and sights, then, as the bays were led out and backed on either side of the phaeton's pole, he went across the cobbles and spoke to the lad at their heads.

"Simmons going in to fetch Captain Kent?"

"Yes, sir. Just coming, sir."

Robert nodded, glanced at the curb of the near horse, loosened it a hole, and, as Simmons came across the yard, said:

"I'm not coming in, Simmons. Better take an extra rug. Mr. Lionel may be cold after his journey—and Reynolds had got Thespean's curb too tight. Speak to him about it," and without awaiting an answer he turned away and went back to the house. Here in the gardens before the house's front all was very quiet—a cat, leaping shadowlike from beneath some holly-bushes, streaked away across the drive before him without a sound, and the bare trees and many-flowering shrubs seemed hardly darker than the sky above

them, save for the jewelled splendour of the stars.

The door was reached by three curved stone steps, and on the bottom one of the three Robert Kent paused, looking away from the house across the grass and the short elm-edged drive to the high iron gates between their tall brick pillars, topped by stone greyhounds—the rooks built in the high, swaying tops of the elms every spring, as well as in the clump that stood just without the gates by the Rectory. In his boyhood's holidays, staying with his married sister, he had watched so eagerly each year for those rooks to return. To the west, yellow as a daffodil, the evening star blazed in the delicate green pallor of the evening sky. Behind him, the house, solid, familiar, beautiful . . . and in exchange a pest-haunted jungle, steaming and rank, death stalking abroad, loneliness, renunciation. Robert clenched his hands and pressed them against his eyes . . . one comfort only remained, that no human soul, not even Simone St. Auban herself, would ever dream of the mad hopes that for a short while had been his, the beauty and the joy and the triumph. All they would know, his family and friends, was that he had chosen deliberately to put his head in the lion's mouth.

The heavy door behind him opened suddenly

and wheeling round, startled and surprised, he saw in the doorway the tall slender figure of a young girl, still almost a child, whose golden-brown hair tumbled in a soft, curly mass to her shoulders, and whose great dark grey eyes met his with equal amazement.

"Robert! Oh, you startled me! I didn't know anyone was there!" she exclaimed. "I thought I heard the horses."

Robert passed his hand over eyes and hair, dazzled a little by the sudden light.

"They've just gone," he said. "I was coming back this way. You'll take cold, Dolores."

Dolores Mandeville, only daughter of the late Duke of Hertebury, sister of the present, the eighth Duke, shook her head.

"It *is* cold. I didn't know it was so sharp. Robert, I'm so impatient to see Lionel! I've not seen him since I was twelve. Will he have altered much, I wonder? He was with us when Daddy was killed."

Robert closed the door and slipped a hand in her arm.

"It's almost six years since I saw him myself, you know, so I can't help you, you incorrigible little hero-worshipper!"

She laughed, but there was indignation in her voice as she answered:

"Of course I'm a hero-worshipper! Wouldn't anyone be of a man who did what he did? I think it was the most wonderful thing any man ever could do! He and those two American soldiers and that American doctor!"

Robert nodded.

"You know I agree," he interrupted. "But remember Lionel has no idea we know anything about it, and if he's at all like what he used to be I advise you not to let him know. Where's Simone?"

"In the drawing-room with Enid and Uncle Alec. Do you want her?"

"No. Not particularly."

They walked arm-in-arm to the drawing-room, which ran across one entire end of the house, a pleasing room, panelled and finely proportioned, lit by lamps and the leaping flames of a big wood fire, and tenanted by three people, two women and one man, the latter in the late sixties, white-haired, clean-shaven, with shrewd, kindly eyes, aquiline features, and an expression at once dignified and benign—Alec Kent, father of Lionel, Robert and Enid.

Of the two women, one, Enid, was so like Robert, although his senior by seven or eight years, that it was easy to see she was his sister; the other was Simone, her sister-in-law and a two

years' widow; a fair woman, beautifully gowned and groomed, whose calculated indifference of manner was rather a trial to her brother Gaston, Enid's husband, who was attached to the French Embassy in London.

As the two entered the room, she looked up and a little smile hovered for a second over her face.

"How very affectionate you are as a family, Enid!" she remarked. "It even extends to Dolores, I see."

Dolores slid her hand from her cousin's arm.

"I am a Kent on my mother's side," she said very distinctly, "and why shouldn't we show affection if we like to?"

"No reason in the world, my dear child!" Simone said with amused contempt in her tone. "No one was attacking you. Why defend yourself? You have not gone to meet your brother, Robert!"

Robert glanced at her, and Enid, watching him idly, saw a hardening of his pupils as though he looked at something he loathed, yet longed for.

"I dislike platform greetings," he said carelessly, and dropping into a chair picked up a book, while Dolores, curling herself into a knot on a far window-seat, looked out at the cold spring

dusk, wondering how long it would be before the lights of the phaeton turned in at the gates.

At sixteen, Dolores was in some ways the veriest child—for sixteen was still young in 1903—with a child's deep, unswerving loyalty and ardour, and in others she was singularly in advance of her years, more notably in an extraordinary understanding of and sympathy with those people for whom she cared. Motherless from birth, she had been adored by her father, and entirely happy with him, and less often, owing to the necessities of education and the like, with her brother, until one never-to-be-forgotten day—her twelfth birthday—when her father was brought home dead from the hunting-field.

The Duke, since his American wife died, had entertained very little, contenting himself with the society of his little daughter and his son, who was eleven years her senior and a cripple. He travelled much, and wherever he went Dolores accompanied him, to the dismay of relatives who would, had they dared, openly have expressed their disapproval of so unconventional a life. She went with him on his yacht to the South Seas and the West Indies; she rode by his side over the passes of the Andes; she spent one queer summer in Iceland; returning always for at least

part of the hunting season to the Duke's seat in the shires. Governesses or tutors came vicariously and, during those hunting months and the brief weeks when the Duke examined and controlled his vast affairs, she worked with a fair regularity.

She acquired, with a child's facility, enough Spanish and Italian to enjoy life where those languages were spoken. French she had known from babyhood, as her nurse had been a Provençal, and her father's French friends and visits to France kept her in constant touch; but of the definite, dull groundwork of facts that constitute the customary education of young children she was woefully ignorant. Her father's circle was a cosmopolitan one; his interests wide; and his friends made much of the slender, grey-eyed child, who was possessed of such charming manners and never obtruded her quick intelligence.

The irregularity, the attention and the too-constant society of very worldly and sophisticated men and women would have ruined a child of less simplicity than Dolores; but her quick sympathies, her lack of self-consciousness, and a naturally unselfish and sweet disposition saved her; from her strange life she gained no harm, but rather a store of impressions and facts that, if they developed her knowledge before her years,

yet also enriched a nature already singularly fine and generous.

And then, with a hideous cruelty, fate had struck. A fast run across big country, a rabbit hole hidden by a tuft of grass, a horse with a broken back and a man killed. Four years had softened a little but never clouded the memory of that day to the child whose world had gone to pieces.

Nicolas, her brother, away in Vienna, summoned to Wyverns Abbey, his arrival at the great hushed house with its horde of shocked and silent servants, relatives descending like a wave from all sides, the funeral—and Nicolas, "His Grace," dark, saturnine, with his bitter, angry eyes and his twisted back, instead of the splendid, vital figure whom he had called father!

Dolores had been taken to an aunt's house in London, set amongst cousins of her own age, treated with kindness and pity, but watched a little, since Lady Flora never felt quite sure whether odd traits might not crop out in her niece's character after so peculiar an upbringing; by which it will be seen that Lady Flora Townley—she had married impeccably—was very much the product of her generation.

At first Dolores had been too stunned with grief to care very much that her free life was at

an end, but, as the first effects of the shock wore off, the irksomeness of routine in such a household as the Townleys' began to affect her. By the standards of the Townley governess she was lamentably ignorant, and the perfection of her French was admittedly praiseworthy, and very soon she was working to a set time-table, such as an hour for history, such for mathematics, such for literature or hated arithmetic. She liked her cousins, but found them unresponsive to all that had meant the chiefest joy of life to her, and they, in their turn, thought her enthusiasm "queer" and her ardours "fuss." They were pleasant enough children, but overshadowed by their mother and without one spark of originality in their compositions. Dolores began to live in dreams, to withdraw to her memories for consolation, which was too sad a thing for a child to do. Yet they brought her very real happiness during the awful loneliness of those four years—years spent almost wholly between Grosvenor Square and Chesley Court, the Townleys' Leicestershire home, with rare visits to the sea after any childish ailment, and a still rarer sight of Nicolas. For the eighth Duke of Hertebury lived but little in England; Wyverns Abbey, Rivaulx Castle and the house in Berkeley Square remained partially closed, and his little sister's desolation did not occur to him. The facts of his

crippled state and his consequent embittered temperament had put a barrier between them that the difference in age alone could never have erected, and Dolores, almost unconsciously, shrank from seeing this unknown brother in her adored father's place. She began to wonder, however, as she grew older, whether she would have to spend all her life away from her own home, and the thought worried her although she never gave it utterance.

One memory had, however, kept courage and hope alive in her heart, and that was the knowledge that one day she must meet again her cousin on her mother's side, Lionel Kent, who had been a guest at Wyverns Abbey at the time of the Duke's death.

From the first glimpse of his little cousin, two days earlier, he had been charmed and charming —Dolores fell headlong in love with him. His face with its powerful yet cleanly-cut features, his curiously steel blue eyes, his strength, which she sensed rather than understood. He had been strangely comforting to the frantic child, yet soothing her not so much by sympathy as by appealing to her courage, and when, just after the funeral he had had to leave, he had been for a moment tender as a woman, holding her in his arms with his cheek pressed to hers.

It was four years ago, but Dolores had not for-

gotten, and when his married sister, her cousin Enid de Melancourt, came to England, consequent upon her husband's appointment to his Embassy there, it was with the greatest pleasure that she heard she was to spend the next two years with her. Enid de Melancourt had been very tactful; she had written to Lady Flora, had thanked her graciously and sincerely for her long care of the child that belonged to both their families, had gone to see her, and had then asked that she might be spared for the next two years to be with her mother's people.

"She hardly knows us," Enid had said. "My father is longing to have his sister's daughter with him, and now that he, too, will be with us for a year or two in England, it will be a wonderful opportunity. You have done so much for her."

Lady Flora had been extremely annoyed at the time when her only brother had married an American from New England, but further acquaintance had converted her to the wisdom of the Duke's choice. In her comfortable, Victorian way she had loved her sister-in-law, Esther Kent, very dearly, and Esther's death had been a real grief; she liked and respected Esther's elder brother Alec, whom she had not met till the Duchess's death; and his daughter Enid de Melancourt and his younger son Robert had thoroughly established themselves

in her favour. Lionel, the elder son, she hardly knew.

Madame de Melancourt was a charming woman of nine-and-thirty; she was childless and could therefore give plenty of time to her young cousin, and Nicolas, formally consulted as one of his sister's guardians, agreed at once that Dolores should go to her—and this March evening Dolores had been with Enid just six months, continuing her education with the Rector every morning while they were at Great Arrowden, and attending numerous classes when they moved to Gaston's charming little house in Wilton Crescent.

Dearly as she had loved her father, it was with her mother's people that she found consolation and community of interest. Enid was cosmopolitan, and her marriage as well as her life had well fitted her to understand her little cousin. Dolores found something of her loneliness vanish and the little core of coldness at her heart not quite so chilled and hard. Enid, too, remembered the young Duchess and could talk of her to her daughter; and when Robert came from the engineering job he had been on in Brazil, and settled himself down for the winter at Great Arrowden, Dolores was happier than she had been since her father's death.

Then one day came the news of Lionel's

expected arrival, and Dolores, escaping from everybody, went for a ride to think over the wonderful news all by herself. She had often longed to ask questions about him of Enid or Robert, but some instinctive shyness or delicacy had kept her from doing so; her memories of him were precious, with the single-mindedness of a child's deep love, and she guarded them as something infinitely dear. She had been deeply sorry when Gaston's sister, Simone St. Auban, arrived unexpectedly from Rome, since it meant a stranger in the intimacy of the family circle, and instantly took a dislike to her—which, in itself, was unusual, for Dolores was as friendly as a puppy. But Simone had nothing spontaneous about her, nothing warm or generous. Blonde, slender, exquisitely *coiffé* and gowned, she was utterly unlike her brother in her complete sophistication and her faintly cynical attitude to the simple virtues and graces of life; and it was because she sensed the deep insincerity beneath the subtle charm, that Dolores so disliked and distrusted Simone St. Auban.

Then, too, a casual remark from Enid to her father had not sufficed to ease her mind.

"Lionel? Oh you need not fear he will care——" What they referred to, Dolores did not know. "Lionel is quite self-sufficient. Besides, he will adore Simone before he's been here twenty-

four hours. Or Simone will know the reason why."

Dolores had puzzled a good deal over that remark, watching Simone when she could do so unobserved. Enid had spoken as though it lay in Simone's hands whether Lionel fell in love with her or not; but how could it? How could a woman make a man "adore" her if she chose? What did it mean? How could it possibly be true? What power could a woman have over a man, that she could choose whether or not he should care for her?

Utterly perplexed and not having any clue to the puzzle, Dolores tried to put it out of her mind, but her feeling of dislike for Simone was thereby strengthened, and a curious unchildlike feeling of anxiety mingled with it. Her own devotion to, and hero-worship of, Lionel Kent had no element of sex in it, for to her sex meant nothing, and while she had knowledge of the mere physical facts of birth, she knew and suspected nothing of the driving force of passion or the physical urge of desire.

All these memories and thoughts crowded in upon the child, for child she still was, as she sat curled up on the window-seat, to be broken by the sound of wheels, the yellow glint of carriage lamps through the gloom, and the sudden almost terrifying joy of Lionel's arrival.

Meantime Lionel Kent himself, arriving in England for the first time for six years, and then only to attend to business that emphatically demanded his attention, found an unexpected relief in the cold clear air, the northern scenery, the oak trees and the bare, frost-nipped fields, so different from all he had known for so long.

He sat in the driving-seat of the light phaeton, the reins between his fingers, watching with pleasure the splendid pair of upstanding bay cobs he drove.

It was four years since his last visit to England, and twelve years since last he had driven along these roads, twelve years since he had visited this house of his sister's, for Enid had bought Great Arrowden Manor soon after her marriage to Gaston de Melancourt, intending it to be a home for her father, and his sensations were not all agreeable, for when he last left this landscape behind him he had not recovered from the shock and misery of Siboney. He shivered as though the air were too cold, and the man beside him said a trifle anxiously.

"Not feeling chilled, Mr. Lionel, are ye, after them hot places down yonder?"

Lionel glanced at the speaker, a withered apple-cheeked man with "England" and "groom" written all over his neat, spry figure and alert face.

"No, Simmons. And what about yourself? The winters you spent in the States don't seem to have hurt you much."

Simmons chuckled and shook his head.

"Nothin' never hurt me in weather, Mr. Lionel. Couldn't beat Leicestershire in winter, where I was as a boy—cold—b-r-r-r—how cold it was in the morning's round along of February when we'd exercise the horses. Damp, too—got right through all clothes and walls. Our place lies low. You remember the pictures, Mr. Lionel?"

"Yes," Lionel nodded, "I remember it. My mother loved it, cold as it was."

"Your mother loved every stick and stone. It was her land—land they'd always had for hundreds of years. My grandfather, he'd worked there and his father and grandfather afore him."

Lionel cast a swift glance at the rolling country with its distant blue line of hills.

"Yes, she settled there and loved it——" he said, musingly, and Simmons shook his head again.

"She loved your father, Mr. Lionel, and any place'd been home to her where he was. But 'twasn't that she forgot Melwale—when she was dyin', and the doctors didn't try to make her believe different, she sent for me and told me I was to teach you and Master Robert so when you'd come back

to England sometimes you'd ride straight across country."

There was a silence, broken only by the ring of the fast-trotting hoofs, then Lionel said half-curiously:

"What about yourself, Simmons? You went into exile with no compensations."

The little man looked up sharply.

"Beggin' your pardon, Mr. Lionel, I come for her. An' that 'twas compensation enough. Long as she lived I'd no wish to leave America, and when she died I'd her wishes to teach you and Master Robert to ride straight across country and learn to handle horses same as she did."

"But, I've been away for twelve years and my brother is uncertain."

"I knew'd you'd come back," the old man said. "Besides, she thanked me for followin' her. Said it made America seem like home, seein' me bossin' the stable lads—an' I reckoned it might make you and Master Robert remember her more if you saw me, too."

Lionel gave him a swift sidelong glance, and shifting his reins to his right hand laid the other for a moment on the old man's arm.

"And I'm grateful, as my mother was, Simmons," he said. "I've been away too long."

Simmons sniffed; he had loved his mistress devotedly, and when she had married Alec Kent and gone to the United States, he had followed her; then eager to impart all possible information to this newly-recovered son of his beloved mistress after so long an absence, he began to talk again.

"Miss Enid"—never could old Simmons call any of the Kents by a married name—"has done a lot to the house, put in hot-water pipes everywhere and electric lights, and the stables are properly beautiful—fine condition the place is. Master Robert, he says to me this mornin'——"

"Master Robert? Is he at home?"

"Ay, to be sure! And fine he looks."

"So, Robert is here——" Lionel's words were half to himself, and from that moment he relapsed into silence for the rest of the five-mile drive, for not since that fateful night at Siboney had he met his brother, and not once had a letter passed between them. The memory of that room at Siboney was painfully vivid, the yellow lamp-light, the hot darkness beyond the window, the wretched furniture—every detail of the lodgings . . . and Robert, white-faced, wild-eyed, all manliness and self-control wiped out by sheer desperate panic, that changes a man into a craven thing, capable of the ultimate cowardice. Robert . . . he had been so gay and brave . . . jesting at danger of

bullet or shell in the Spanish war, never even as a child afraid of the dark or of other more tangible things. Yet before the onslaught of a fever, before the threat of all the loathsome details of the "black vomit," he lost nerve and every shred of decency. The ugliness of fear, of stark, staring terror . . . would he, Lionel, ever forget that look on his brother's face, those frantic clutchings of his hands, the panting, sobbing words. . . .

The bays jibbed and quickened their pace, Simmons glanced at his master's grim mouth and steely eyes, and along the straight half-mile of road that led to the turn where the gates were.

"You'd best slow 'em for the gates, sir," the old man said. "Miss Enid had 'em put up a bit nearer on account of a tree we had blown down last month."

His voice brought Lionel back with a jerk from the melancholy of his thoughts, and he realized that they were approaching white gates, set between posts, and rails that led with a sharp turn into a short drive. Pulling the swiftly-moving horses to a slower pace he wheeled the phaeton in and drew up before the house.

Meanwhile in the house, Robert, too, had seen the arrival of the phaeton. Before Dolores could speak, he said:

"Here he is," and went suddenly and swiftly

out of the room. Simone followed him, and five minutes later Dolores, standing by the heavy curtain, saw Lionel enter. It was the same face she remembered—the same bronzed skin and rather light keen eyes, the same very slightly-jutting underlip; but he looked far older, the face was deeply lined, the jaw hard, the expression changed . . . he greeted his father and sister, then Enid spoke her name.

"And Dolores, Lionel. You remember her?"

He turned fully towards her then, and she found herself gazing straight into his eyes, and excitement choked speech in her throat and made her tremble.

"So this is Dolores?" he said smiling a little, "whom I left—so high! You kissed me when I went away, won't you kiss me now I return?"

A lovely faint rose crept into her face, her eyes shone, her sensitive mouth quivered into a delighted smile.

Lifting her face she felt the touch of his lips on her cheek, and simply, like the child she was, returned his kiss, then found her voice.

"It is so long ago," she said. "You should not have left us alone so long, should he, Uncle Alec?"

"No, my dear, but thank God he's here at last. Suppose you show him his room, eh, Enid?"

Enid nodded, smiling a little.

"Yes, go with Dolores, Lionel; she will show you."

As the door closed behind them, and they crossed the wide old hall, Lionel slipped his hand within Dolores's arm, charmed by this child, as she seemed to him, whom he had always remembered with tenderness and who seemed hardly changed save that she was taller and more slender, this child with her beautiful eager eyes and sweet smile. Young girls, budding into womanhood, had come but little into his life; he saw in Dolores a young cousin, charmingly pleased to welcome him, and the loneliness, to which he had for years accustomed himself, seemed abruptly to be distasteful.

Talking lightly he walked with her upstairs, and to the threshold of the room where he had slept with Robert the last time he had been in his sister's home, and stood for a moment in the doorway; then, with a return of his old abruptness, he spoke:

"Robert is here, isn't he? Would you ask him, if you know where he is, to come and see me?" and Dolores, only too anxious to serve him in some way, smiled and ran off.

She never analysed her emotions; it was natural to be glad or grieved, joyous or sad; she was deeply

affectionate, and slumbering passion had not yet been awakened—indeed the first warnings of its birth-pangs passed by unheeded, since it did not occur to her to inquire into reasons below the surface of her feelings, or investigate the nature of her pleasure at Lionel's greeting.

A minute or two after she had left Lionel's room, there came a knock at his door, followed by Robert's voice.

"Can I come in?" and Robert himself entered, rather white for all his casually courteous manner.

The elder brother stood for a hardly noticeable second, then he said, with seeming carelessness:

"Hullo, old fella'. How are you?"

"I had no idea you were coming until two hours ago," Robert said, after that instant's awkward pause. "I would have gone to town if I had known in time."

Lionel, cigarette-case in hand, frowned, then smiled.

"Don't be a fool," he said; "everybody goes to pieces one time or another. That's over. What are you doing now? I've not heard one word from you for years."

Robert took the proffered cigarette, lit it and handed the match to his brother.

"I am going down to Panama," he said; "got an appointment as an assistant engineer. It won't

be final till the Americans take over, but that's bound to be in two or three months."

"Panama? The canal construction? But——"

"But I am deliberately risking what I ran away from?" Robert smiled rather ironically. "Yes. That's why."

Lionel was silent a moment, then nodded.

"I understand. Good luck to you. There's a good deal to talk over—we'll have time to-morrow."

But his statement was not to be fulfilled, since, three hours later, as they all sat at dinner, Lionel was absorbed in a person quite other than his brother, fascinated and swept off his feet all the more completely because for years he had turned his back on women and put them out of his life.

Enid knew her sister-in-law; her elder brother she knew, too, as no one else knew him, and, watching, she realized just exactly what Simone had set herself out to accomplish. And she would succeed. Lionel's attentions were marked, he seemed unable to take his eyes from Simone, and Simone was very well content that it should be so. She was a widow, she was extravagant, she could not live without the admiration of men, and was able, by a smile, a look in the eyes that promised so much, to drive men mad to possess her.

She had made it her business to find out all

she could from Enid about Lionel, and, now that they had met, she was forced to admit to herself that he was extremely attractive. Wealthy, too; the owner of a fortune big enough to give her all the things she wanted . . . he was worth capturing, and he would save her from ennui on this winter country visit.

Dolores remembered Enid's words only too clearly during the next day or two, for Lionel paid little attention to anyone but Simone, who seemed well content to monopolize him. The weather, too, turned unexpectedly cantankerous, and on the third morning of his arrival Lionel awoke to see his room brilliant with the reflected light of snow. For a minute or two he lay in the pleasant borderland of sleep and waking, then, as sleep receded, he realized more clearly where he was. Simone seldom appeared until luncheon time and the morning promised a pleasurable ride; he suggested the same to Robert, and the two started off about eleven, Robert, glad enough at any approach from the brother to whom he felt much as a stranger might feel.

The morning was one of dazzling beauty, the sky a pale yet vivid blue, the whole countryside carpeted in snow, the trees laden, the sunshine striking a myriad diamonds from every twig and winter leaf. The river was steely, a dark ribbon

between the white fields, and the air, absolutely still, had the exhilaration of wine.

The two brothers rode almost in silence, both busy with their own thoughts, and in the minds of both Simone St. Auban occupied a goodly space; but presently Lionel, deliberately putting her memory from him, pulled his horse to a walk and glanced at his brother.

"Robert," he said "tell me something more about your plans for the future. You mentioned Panama . . . I've casually read a good deal, but it may not be exact information."

Robert, thus abruptly brought back to every-day life, hesitated a moment, then did his best to supply the required information.

"You know we are to take over the Canal from the French, of course. Well the President is going to organize a commission to survey the Isthmus, and that means engineers and the commencement of the biggest engineering job ever tackled. I've applied to go as one of the assistant engineers, and though I don't think there's the least likelihood of getting there right away, I've been told that I stand a good chance of an appointment when the Isthmus is formally taken over."

"Yes. Do you happen to know where Crawford is?"

"Crawford?" A faint dull flush crept to the

younger man's cheekbones; he looked fixedly ahead between his horse's ears. "Yes. He went out to Egypt to the Egyptian Medical Congress. I suppose that means he was wanted to examine the Suez Canal sanitary work. I have kept myself informed of his movements."

The other glanced at him curiously.

"Why?"

"Because there may come a day when I can put matters right with him and you. When I can square my conscience—put it that way if you like. And Crawford is the man who matters."

"Don't be a fool," Lionel said curtly, his eyes suddenly hard. "That's over and done with, as I said before. I forbid you ever to mention it to Crawford. He is no more interested in me than in any other of the thousand and one officers who have served under him."

"No?" Robert's voice deepened, shook a little. "Good God, do you think I don't know what it meant to you?—what you did to save me? And what you have done since—at Las Animas—the test under Crawford and the others. You have every right to think me a coward and heartless—I've never yet proved myself anything else—but, by God, I will——"

Lionel, angry that the wretched incident had been referred to, uncomfortable at his brother's

emotion, nevertheless could hardly ignore his attitude completely.

"Do you think I grudged it?" he said, after a moment. "Everyone loses their control sometime or another. If ever I want help I shall call on you. Now put the whole thing out of your mind and tell me about the Canal. Don't forget I've been in Paris for three years and know no American news. I've been too busy."

And Robert obeyed, giving what information he had, for in 1903 American news in Paris was not the everyday affair it is to-day, and it was evident, as he talked, that the project of carrying out what the French had begun had seized not only upon his imagination but upon his ambition.

"They'll have their work cut out. The job is about as impossible as any ever attempted, and unless they clear the Isthmus of fever and malaria, I don't see how we are going to do any better than the French, poor devils."

"You think Crawford is going to do it?"

"Yes. Pretty sure of it. Why was he sent over to Egypt? And he's going on this commission, that I happen to know. Why? You interested?"

"Very. I have been studying tropical medicine since I left Havana in 1898, and I have taken my Paris and Johns Hopkins degrees. If we are

really starting work on the Isthmus, I shall follow your example and apply for a post in the Army Medical Service."

"That would be stunning!" Robert exclaimed. "I didn't guess you would think of that."

"Didn't you? I've been thinking of it for months. There's big work to be done. I am going to Washington in a week or two, and I shall try and find out further details and get something definite settled."

"There'll be plenty of time," Robert said with rather a rueful grin; "they'll all fight over the construction. I've been there—this last summer—and the problems are terrific. You've the tides to consider and the difference in the fall is considerable; then you've the Chagres river that floods like the devil after heavy rains, and heavy rains occur all the year round, and the Chagres flows right across the course the canal must take. There is the failure of the French who did so magnificently in Egypt, and through no fault of their own, and already the name of the Panama Canal stinks as a financial proposition. Oh, they've their work cut out all right."

"Consoling chap you are!" Lionel remarked. "However, you're probably right. Here we are at Little Arrowden Crossing; if we want to get back for luncheon we'd better turn."

They swung their horses round and let the eager creatures have their heads for a while, then, as they came in distant sight of Great Arrowden, Lionel spoke in rather a constrained voice.

"How long have you known Madame St. Auban?"

"Some time."

"Not in the least like Gaston . . . does she like America?"

"She has never been, I believe."

Silence fell between them once again, which lasted until they rode into the big cobbled stable-yard; and as Lionel entered the house by a sideway he met Dolores with Pip, the spaniel, just coming in from the gardens; Dolores flushed with running and playing with the dog, and looking herself a mere child with her golden-brown hair ruffled, her eyes a-shine and full of laughter, her unformed slender figure.

"We've been snow-balling, Pip and I!" she informed him half-conscious of a great relief that he had not yet seen Simone. "Glorious fun. You and Robert have been riding—did you go far?"

"Little Arrowden Crossing. The country looks wonderful. Why didn't you ask me to come snow-balling?"

"I shouldn't dream of so insulting your dignity!" she retorted; "and don't tell Enid.

She has already almost given up hope of ever turning me into a woman of the world!"

"I should hope so! Don't let her even try."

Dolores laughed, but her eyes lost something of their gaiety.

"Do you like me better as I am?" she asked, and there was a quick, wistful eagerness in her tone.

"Much better!" he answered promptly and slipped his arm within hers. "You are adorable just as you are, and I should hate to have you changed. Besides, who wants a woman of the world at your age?"

"I'm sixteen!" Dolores' tone was indignant. "You speak as if I were no older than I was when you went away!"

"What a great age!" he mocked. "Sixteen! And you look twelve; that's what I thought you were."

"Do I look such a baby as that?"

"Every bit," he teased, "especially when you are cross."

"I'm not cross! But I'm really grown up."

"Very. Little great-grandmother. Don't frown or I shall have to kiss you."

"I don't allow people to kiss me just when they feel inclined!" she said with a delicious little air of dignity. "When you arrived it was different. You were serious. Now you are just laughing at me."

He looked down into her face past the tumbled, curly hair, and ceased his teasing.

"I won't laugh at you any more," he said; "and I won't think of you as twelve. To prove it I'll tell you what Robert and I talked about, if you're ready to come indoors."

The study, nominally, belonged to Mr. Alec; in reality, it was a general sanctum to which everyone desiring complete peace or its owner's individual company, retired. Now, in the hour before luncheon, it was empty as Lionel had guessed it would be.

Flushed with pleasure, Dolores settled herself in a chair on one side of the hearth, while Lionel, a cigarette between his lips, began to tell her of part of his conversation with Robert about Panama; at first, only to make up lest his teasing words had really hurt her, but as he proceeded he realized that in her he had an absorbed listener. Led on by her eager interest and few intelligent questions he went further than he had done with his brother, unfolding plans that for months had lain dormant and half-formed, and the gong for luncheon startled them both.

"Good heavens, have I talked all this time?" he exclaimed in some consternation. "Why didn't you stop me? I must have bored you terribly."

"Was it likely, when I was so tremendously

interested?" she said; "and I wasn't bored. I've seen Panama. Daddy's yacht called there and we stayed three days. I think it is wonderful—the whole project. And I hope, with all my heart, you will get the post you desire."

Her sincerity was unmistakable, and he realized rather abruptly that she had been right and he wrong in the estimation of herself. She was not a child in mind or powers, whatever her emotions, for she had understood every word he had said, appreciating difficulties and offering more than once a suggestion that showed her keen intelligence. She was a delightful companion, sweet, honest, sensible; Lionel came out of the study arm-in-arm with her and met Simone in the hall.

Dolores felt his arm slacken, knew instantly that her own delightful hour of his society was at an end, but greeted her fellow-guest smiling; but it was to Lionel that Simone turned after a reply so brief that it was hardly courteous.

"What energy you have on such a morning!" she exclaimed, so deftly detaching his attention from Dolores that he was not even aware of it. "I saw you riding off with Robert two hours ago and wondered why you had not asked me. It looked so glorious out."

"I did not dream you would come," he said quickly. "It would have given me the most

tremendous pleasure. Let me drive you this afternoon? There are some fine scenes round here."

"This afternoon? I don't know. Perhaps. Ah, Enid! Good morning. Do you often greet your guests with weather like this?"

And Dolores, sadly jealous, saw from her own room later the phaeton and pair come round, saw Simone smothered in furs take her seat and Lionel get in beside her.

He tucked the rug carefully about her, nodded to Simmons, who let the horses' heads go, and, with a queer little pang at her heart that she did not understand, Dolores saw Simone lift a laughing face and make some remark, and Lionel bend down to answer it, looking at her with unmistakable admiration. Then the horses broke into a trot, and the phaeton passed out of sight round a bend in the drive.

CHAPTER IV

SIMONE said very little for the first few miles, being occupied with her own thoughts while apparently admiring the beauty of the scene around her. She had given rather a lot of time to her thoughts these last two days, and the result of them was her action in accepting Lionel's invitation to drive; she loathed the cold, scenery did not interest her, and driving bored her at the best of times. But, this afternoon was different. She wanted an uninterrupted hour or two of Lionel's society and this was the assured way to get it; also, she was determined to ascertain just exactly where she stood with him and no better way than this tête-à-tête could be imagined.

In the house, half a dozen interruptions might occur; out here, none.

He was rich, he was most certainly attractive to look at, he was sufficiently cosmopolitan to satisfy her every mental and social requirement, and beside those qualities his peculiar moodiness of temper and desire to wander about the world, of which Enid had told her, sunk to insignificance.

She had given the matter of remarriage much consideration, and she was content with the decision she had made.

When at last she began to speak, they had driven some four miles and Lionel was beginning to wonder if he had been wise in thus carrying her off; her words, however, dispelled his fears.

"How kind you all are to a stranger," she said, looking up at him with a dazzling smile. "Here am I, only Enid's sister-in-law, yet you treat me as an old and valued friend. Is it that all you Americans are so charming, or is it just yourself and your family?"

"I think it is because you come to us with such a willingness to be charming yourself," he said. "Does that sound banal? I do not want it to. And we are half-English. You must not forget that."

"It is the American half I prefer. The English take so long to welcome one. How I long to visit America!"

"Do you? I am glad."

"Are you? But you are seldom there."

"My work keeps me away, but some day, perhaps, you will visit my house at Great Hampden, Connecticut. My father sold it when my sister married and came to Europe. He no longer wished to be there alone. I bought it a year or two ago. It is rather a charming place."

"I will come when you ask me," Simone said. "It is strange, is it not, that your father is American and your mother English, and your aunt, the late Duchess of Hertebury, was American, and her husband English. She was your father's sister, n'est-ce pas?"

"Yes. So we are half-English as my cousins the Mandevilles are half-American."

Simone nodded; the news suited her plans very well, as she had no intention of burying herself in America for three-quarters of the year, and Lionel might as well know it.

After a minute or two she spoke rather sadly:

"I wonder if you know how lucky you are in possessing a home that is unalienably yours? Somewhere of your own—with me, I have wandered so much and I am so tired of an endless round of social duties."

"But you have your château—Enid tells me it is beautiful."

"My husband mortgaged it heavily and my father's house belongs, of course, to Gaston. Men are fortunate. They have so much."

"They are not fortunate if they are alone, any more than women," Lionel argued, but Simone shook her fair head.

"Oh, no! That is because you are a man you say that. But if you were a woman, as I am, you

would know what loneliness means. Gaston has Enid and their son, but I——" she shrugged her shoulders, a world of eloquence in the gesture, then added more lightly: "But this is of no importance. Tell me about your own profession. You are interested in medicine, are you not?"

He fell into the trap like any raw boy, because she was an exquisite and very finished product of her world, and he, for nearly five years, had lived apart from women in the world of hard work and bitterness of his own making. Also, because he was a clever man and had, before that ugly scene at Siboney and the Spanish war, known and been a part of the same world, he made his conversation deeply interesting; and when he broke off to say with a sudden authority: "Are you warm enough? You look pale," and his hand, tucking the fur rug closer round her, touched hers, she felt a quiver run through her nerves, and a heat enter her blood.

The physical sensation startled her into a knowledge of danger. She had played with fire all her life, but the possibility that she herself could be burned had never occurred to her, or, if it had, she had not considered it as a serious menace.

Now, suddenly this man, whom she had decided should give her what she wanted—a home and background more stable than the shifting scenes of her more recent years—had become something

of supreme importance. Instead of power being entirely in her hands, it was in his; he possessed a quality, magnetism, bodily attraction, what you will, that assumed supreme proportions in her scheme of life. A touch of the hand, unintentional and fleeting, had revealed to her her danger, and the prospect dismayed her.

Perplexed by her silence, by the startled yet absent expression of her face, Lionel repeated his question.

"Are you cold? Shall we turn back? I have brought you too far!"

"No, no! I am not cold. Please!"

He was pulling the horses to a standstill, and in spite of her appeal swung them round.

"I have brought you too far!" he repeated. "I forgot you are not used to our northern winters."

"I am beautifully, gloriously warm!" she declared. "I was silent only because I was happy. It is so very good to be happy for a little."

"That does not sound right for anyone like yourself," he said, glancing down from the high driving-seat. "Has life treated you so scurvily as that?"

"Life is what we make it, I suppose," she said drearily; "at least we are always told so. From our cradles that is drilled into us, is it not? The

only pity is that we are never told how to make it differently."

"We should not listen."

"No, I suppose not. It seems a cruel jest to play upon us, does it not, this half-knowledge with which we are endowed, this pretence to wisdom. It would surely have been as easy to give us enough light to steer our course by, to make our lives at least a semblance of what we would have them!"

"You speak bitterly," Lionel said. "Surely, of all people, you should have least cause for reproach against God or Fate."

She looked up at him with serious questioning eyes.

"Has Gaston never told you how very much cause I have had?" she asked; and in some surprise he shook his head.

"Never. Why should Gaston discuss you with me?"

She felt she had blundered, although realizing that he had not intended his words as a reproof, and quickly she sought to recover herself.

"I express my meaning badly. When one has endured what I have endured, disaster and ignominy assume too large proportions. We think the entire world knows of our misfortunes instead of one very small corner of it. Forgive me for my egotism."

With a quick movement Lionel turned to her.

"My dear, I didn't mean that!" he said impetuously. "Surely I was not so clumsy. It was I who expressed myself badly through sheer surprise at what your speech suggested. Won't you tell me if—if you think I am to be trusted?"

"Indeed I think that. I know it."

For the moment she was quite sincere, touched by his swiftly generous mood, and after a moment, very soberly, she began to speak.

"I was married as so many French girls are —all of my circle in society—straight from the schoolroom. I knew nothing of life or of men. I dreamed of fidelity and lasting love, and when I first discovered my husband had an intrigue with one of my own friends, I was like a mad creature. Demented. Frantic. When it had been explained to me by my relatives, with extreme care, that the world was not at an end because Edouard was unfaithful, I consented to see him. He was infatuated. Begged me to divorce him. You know Parisian society, so you may guess how infatuated he was if he contemplated such a step as that. I refused. He prayed, implored, wept. I still refused, ignorant little fool that I was, and then, quite abruptly he ceased his appeals and left me. I should have known he would not relinquish his purpose so easily. Then came a time of much

entertaining, of many social duties, and gradually from the welter of our acquaintances emerged one —a man. Edouard constantly threw us together would ask him to escort me, to dine—one night, when this man brought me home from a ball, and was bidding me farewell at the doorway of my drawing-room, Edouard came from his bedroom and accused him of being my lover.

"I should have known. I had lived with Edouard for two years, but even then I could not believe he could be so base. Could deliberately lay such a trap to catch two innocent people. I fought, but it was useless. We had but little money, we could not afford the great lawyers that he could engage, and he had all the machinery wealth could command at his back. He won his suit and I was left with but my own small income. For months I was stunned, bewildered . . . *folle* . . . Gaston was amazing to me. Gradually I came back to life—the world guessed something I think of what I had suffered—and then Edouard died. So it was all in vain. All so senseless and cruel. Do you wonder that I am bitter about the ignorance with which we face our lives?"

Lionel made no immediate answer. He was moved and profoundly indignant. It never occurred to him to question her statements or think she might have exaggerated her misfortunes.

Had he been less emotionally disturbed he might perhaps have retained more of his worldly wisdom, but, as it was, this woman had bound him hand and foot and he was helpless. That any man, whose special duty it was to protect a young and innocent girl, could so grossly misuse her, made his blood boil; he did not speak at once because he could not, and when at last he had gained some kind of control, his voice still shook a little with indignation.

"I don't know how to answer you. What you have told me . . . it is horrible that you should have had to endure such things. Horrible! Gaston——"

"Do not mention all this to Gaston," she interrupted hastily. "Gaston felt it so deeply that I never refer to it now. It is all over. Promise you will say nothing!"

"Of course not, if you wish it. But it can't rest like this. Can I not do anything? Is there no way I can help you?"

"Your sympathy helps me. That is worth much. I should not have spoiled our happy afternoon by reciting all my miseries. You must forgive me."

"Forgive you!"

There was a storm of passion in the two words, and for a moment it seemed as though that storm

would break; but self-control was second nature and he checked himself and after a moment spoke quietly.

"Simone," he said, "you must let me help you . . . you must let me put things right for you. It is monstrous what you have been through. Listen"—again he paused, and for a moment she thought she had spoken too precipitately and that he would offend her sense of the fitness of things, but she need not have feared. He forced back the torrent of speech that clamoured for utterance, and not till they were nearly home did he speak again, and then in no intimate strain.

"You will at least stay as long as you can with us, will you not?" he said. "I know how pleased Enid will be if you will prolong your visit as long as possible."

"That is charming of you," she said quietly, and for the moment her sense of gratitude was sincere. "I cannot stay longer than Monday, I fear, as I am crossing to Paris. I have matters to attend to there that cannot easily be left longer."

Dismay seized him at the thought of her departure. He was desperately in love, but he retained enough sense and realization of fact to know that his desire for her was largely physical and that he might not find in her the companion

that his other self demanded; but he was, too, he knew, in the grip of elemental things, desire and passion that he had repressed with an iron will for these last years, and the grip was relentless.

All that evening he was actively and passionately aware of her, whether he were talking to others or out of her sight at the farther side of the room; he walked and talked and acted like an automaton, and when at last she had gone up to her room he was so restless that his father, sitting near the hearth in the big, winged, grandfather-chair that was his particular seat, looked up at him with a quizzical little smile.

"Lionel," he said, "are you in love or have you a guilty conscience? One or the other must be troubling you."

Lionel, stuffing a pipe, ceased, and glanced at him.

"It is not hard to guess, is it?" he said. "Do you wonder? She is exquisite."

Alec Kent's benevolent face lost its smile; he was silent a moment, then he said gravely:

"No. I do not wonder. She is, as you say, exquisite."

Lionel glanced swiftly at the elder man, for something in the dryness of his tone was not quite expected.

"You have known Madame St. Auban some

time, have you not?" he inquired, vaguely disturbed, but his father shook his head.

"No. Only by hearsay from Enid. Robert knew her before she married. This is her first visit."

The younger man finished stuffing his pipe, lit it, and going over to a chair at no little distance said abruptly:

"Robert is very interested in the Panama Canal project. Did you know?"

"Yes. He consulted me. I agree entirely with his wish to seek an appointment there. It will give him a future. And speaking of futures, my dear lad, what are your plans? Is there any hope that you will come back to us here? Or do you intend to settle in the old house?"

"Neither, at present. Whatis there to come back for? I'm best as a free-lance."

The elder man looked at him and shook his head.

"An unsatisfactory life—free-lancing," he said, half-humorously, half-sadly. "Every man is the better for home ties."

"There must be some of us foot-loose," his son objected. "We cannot all be centres of family life."

"That is so. But I was not cut out for an old bachelor, and neither, I think, are you. None of the Kents are at their best alone."

Lionel shrugged, smiled indulgently, and was silent for a minute, and his father seeing the smile spoke again:

"Every man is the better for responsibilities he cannot waive," he said. "For those fortunate enough to possess them, a home and family, for the others, close friends—but always someone. Loneliness comes as inevitably as night follows day, and loneliness is a demon."

"All of which I endorse heartily. But all the same, my dear father, I, too, am going to Panama, and for a man in Panama ties are unwise."

"You, too, to Panama? My dear Lionel, this is amazing news. Why? For what?"

"Army medical, if they will have me;" and, launched upon a subject that had attracted him for years, Lionel sketched out his plans, to the absorbed interest of the elder man, who, as he paused, said quickly:

"A fine idea—very fine. And you say Major —Colonel, isn't he now?—Crawford is going there on the Commission soon."

"Yes. I believe so. It's got to come, this work on the Canal, and Crawford is the man to make it possible.

"So I believe. A fine man."

"One of the finest. A great man. . . ."

"He was in Havana when you were there—

the officer in command of the Base Hospital if I remember right?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever seen him since?"

Lionel ceased pulling at his pipe, and fidgeted with it for a moment. When he answered his voice sounded strained.

"Yes, once;" then he added with something of an effort: "if anyone can make the Isthmus possible for white men, Colonel Crawford is the man to do it."

"I am glad he is to go. But, Lionel—it is asking your sister a good deal that you should both go to the Isthmus. For myself, I understand and approve."

"She has Gaston."

"That is so, but you take your lives in your hands if you both go to Panama—why, Dolores, I thought you were asleep long since."

The door had opened to show her on the threshold, a blue wrapper lined with fur caught round her over a white nightdress, the frilled turn-over collar of which fastened like a child's close about her young throat and made her look younger than ever; and Lionel was struck by her wistful loveliness more in evidence now than in her busy daytime hours. At sight of him she had hesitated, and now at her uncle's question spoke hurriedly.

"I'm so sorry. I had no idea you were not alone."

"My dear, it is of no consequence. Is anything wrong?"

"No. But I had forgotten to give you a message. It came just before dinner and something put it out of my head. I waked just now and remembered. It was that old Coates wants you to see him at noon to-morrow about the East Woods—he has decided to sell and came up to tell you so. Instead, he saw me by the gates and sent the message. I think, secretly, he was delighted to get out of telling you himself that he had climbed down."

"The old rascal! Come over to the fire, child; you will be frozen."

"I'm quite warm—but I am interrupting——"

"Not in the world," Lionel pulled a low chair up to the hearth, where logs and coal glowed in a great red-hot mass. "It's a bitter night. What woods are these?"

"Some woods—a hundred and fifty acres in all, adjoining this property to the east. It is a slice right out of the land and should never have been sold away. It was some eighty years ago, before Enid bought the property, and though she has made several efforts to regain it they have always been unsuccessful—till now. I am acting, of

course, for her, but this old reprobate believes I want it for myself. Dolores, my dear, what did you say?"

Dolores laughed and her eyes danced.

"I said you would be prepared to consider it, but that I believed you were not so anxious to buy more timberland as you had been a few months ago."

It was Mr. Kent's turn to laugh.

"Bravo! Bravo! You have a shrewd head. It will make the old rascal nervous."

Dolores, now quite unconscious of her unconventional attire, was seated on a big hassock by the fire, her hands clasping her knees, her eyes dancing and her pale, clean-cut, little face alight with amusement.

"Of course I have a shrewd head! Considering how I've travelled the earth all my life I ought to have learned something. Uncle Alec"—she turned to her cousin—"Uncle Alec is a darling, but he really is not interested in anything but his garden, fruit and flowers. Now I help Enid quite practically with the farm and the dairy. Oh yes! I am the business-brain of this establishment!"

Lionel stretched out his hand and gently pulled her soft hair.

"You are the incarnation of hard worldly

wisdom," he assured her, and she made a little grimace at him; then suddenly, she spoke very seriously.

"Lionel," she said, "I heard you speaking of Panama. Are you going as well as Robert?"

Alec Kent looked at her, then at his nephew.

"Robert gives Dolores all his confidence," he said. "Even before he told me, he discussed his affairs with her."

"Robert and I have always been friends," Dolores said quickly. "He is quite right to go—he must. But you, Cousin Lionel—it is different."

"I shall go if I can get there. Why not?"

"It is—very dangerous."

He laughed the suggestion away half-impatiently; but later he wondered why she had demurred at danger for him, but accepted it so much as a matter of course for Robert; and then sleep came and his dreams were of Simone, Simone at first beautiful, with her arms about his neck growing tighter and tighter till he was strangling —confused dreams that did not pass into restful slumber till nearly morning.

The next day snow fell heavily once again, and it was mid-afternoon before he had a chance of talking to Simone, then it was to find her alone in a corner of the south parlour—a low, cream-panelled room looking out over the gardens and

the snow-laden trees to the blue line of hills invisible now through the thickly-falling snow.

She was reading a letter, but when he entered she put it aside and patted the couch beside her.

"Have you come to cheer me up?" she asked, looking up at him. "I need it."

"Do you?" he did not at once sit down, but stood looking at her. "Why? Have you had bad news?"

"Bad? No. Merely troublesome and a little annoying. The usual thing, mon cher, my lawyers saying the property requires money and no money is forthcoming—petty worries to you, but to me——"

A shrug ended her sentence, then she smiled.

"But why burden you with my tiresome affairs? They have not even the interest of tragedy. Let us talk of more pleasant things. Tell me, are you going to settle down soon in this charming place?"

"No. My plans are uncertain," his voice was rather harsh, he was no longer looking at her but out at the fairyland of whirling snow beyond the windows. "There are many things to consider. And you? What are your plans?"

"Mine? Oh, for me, my future is cut and dried. I cross to Paris, I return to my chateau some fifty miles north of Paris, and endeavour to raise money for necessary repairs, so that I can

again lease it. If I succeed—Paris and a little *appartement*. If not—a life, solitary and oh! extremely virtuous, in the country, with the wind and the rain and the birds and cows, and the curé's society when I need social dissipation, varied by occasional visits to heaven when I stay with Enid and Gaston or other friends kind enough to invite a poor relative!"

"You are not fond of the country?"

"*Ma foi*, yes! As you know it, like this. Light, heat, horses, servants; but at Château Valence, stone floors, candles, wood fires that heat but an iota of the rooms, narrow muddy lanes, no one to speak to—no, my friend! Paris appeals to me more."

Her words might have sounded like an appeal for pity, but her tone and the amusement in her glance forbade him to take them in such a way; she leaned back and looked up at him and her eyes softened.

"Do sit down and be restful," she entreated. "I feel that you are sitting in judgment upon me because I have grumbled."

"Me? In judgment?" Astonished, he stared at her; then, yielding to her wishes, he sat down on the couch beside her.

"I am poor company," he said. "I have been alone a great deal. You must forgive me."

"Alone?" Her eyebrows lifted. "Why? It seems to me any loneliness on your part must have been voluntary."

"It was. Simone, did you mean what you said yesterday about allowing me to help you?" Startled at the sudden intensity of his voice she drew back a little.

"Yes," she said, after a moment's pause. "That is, I accept your friendship, your kindness and sympathy."

"Friendship? Sympathy? I'm not thinking of those things. Simone, you must know what you have done to me."

Her breath quickened a little in spite of herself; he was leaning towards her, one arm along the back of the couch, and his face was hard and keen and his eyes smouldered.

"You must have known!" he repeated. "From the moment you arrived I have had no thought for anyone, for anything else in the world. You have blotted out everything but yourself. Simone —I love you—I want you—I adore you—will you marry me?"

His voice was hoarse with the passion that blazed in his eyes as he looked at her, his hands trembled—Simone caught her breath, trembling in her turn, aware of the drama of the moment, aware of the danger that lay before her if she

accepted, of the sordid dullness of life if she refused; and weakened as she had never been weakened before by the newly-born desire within her that made her body play traitor to her will, she threw caution to the winds and held out one hand to him.

"It—was the same with me!" she said, and got no further before he had crushed her in his arms, his kisses stifling all speech.

Sometime later in the afternoon when the winter dusk was falling, earlier even than usual by reason of the weather, Enid came looking for some book she had mislaid, and entering the south parlour stopped short on the threshold.

"Simone——"

Simone left her hand and arm lying across her lover's knee and looked across smiling.

"You are surprised? Naturally. So was I. Enid, *ma chère*, why did you not tell me that your brother was so precipitate?"

Enid made no immediate answer, instead, she came slowly across the room and stood by the high, white mantelshelf, resting her hand upon it —tall, elegant, thoroughbred to her finger-tips, she reminded Lionel with sudden intensity of Robert. Amazed at her silence he spoke rather sharply.

"Simone has promised to marry me. Will you not give us your congratulations?"

Enid started a little as though his words had recalled her to the sense of what was expected; swiftly she recovered herself.

"Why, of course. I was so surprised. I could think of nothing. My dear Simone, you have captured a hardened bachelor. I hope he will be tractable."

She ignored Lionel, speaking only to Simone, with a note of banter in her tone; and afterwards, Lionel, going to her room just before she had finished dressing for dinner, asked her why she had behaved so strangely.

"I? Behaved strangely? My dear boy, I am most apologetic if I did; but you must admit you have, as Simone said, been precipitate. I was naturally amazed."

"I am amazed myself. Love and marriage were never further from my thoughts than when I arrived here three days ago. Enid, why didn't you or Gaston tell me before how exquisite she was?"

"My dear Lionel, we are neither of us match-makers!" her tone still held that note of banter; never very intimate with either of her brothers, she now gave him the impression that she was deliberately keeping him at bay. "Simone is not the type I should have expected would attract you, had I thought about it," she added. "Now Dolores——"

"Dolores? She's a child!"

"Not so much a child as you think. Dolores in many ways is mature. She has a child's simplicity and warm affections, but her brain is by no means that of childhood and later she would——"

"I haven't come to discuss Dolores," he said with some irritability. "I came to ask you a question. You have answered it more or less. So I won't keep you longer."

She let him get to the door, then she said very quietly:

"Have you told Robert?"

"Not yet. Why?"

"I think I would tell him as soon as you can. He will perhaps be hurt that I knew since this afternoon. He has gone down—if you go at once you will have a few minutes alone with him."

Puzzled by her attitude, resenting it, he nevertheless took her advice and found Robert alone in the library, glancing idly through the morning's paper. He threw it aside as his brother entered.

"Hullo, old chap? You look very absorbed by something. What's the reason?"

Lionel came across the room, held out the cigarette-case to his brother and took a cigarette himself.

"I am," he said briefly. "I have just asked Simone St. Auban to marry me."

There was a moment's complete silence, then almost as if the words were forced from him, Robert spoke: "You have just asked—she refused, of course?"

"Refused me?" Lionel lifted his head, the match burning between his fingers and stared at his brother. "On the contrary she accepted me. What the devil do you mean?"

Robert made a fierce effort to act and speak as usual; already he had upset his brother by his foolish remark. It was hard to speak when a blow under the heart took the breath and hurt —God! how savagely it hurt!

"Why—you are such a case-hardened bachelor —all over the globe—Simone is so sophisticated —how in the world will you get on?"

The elder man looked at the younger in silence for a moment; there was an expression in Robert's eyes which he did not like or understand. For years he had gone his own way and the loneliness had not improved a naturally imperious temper; he took criticism badly and resented interference, and since it seemed to him that Robert was criticizing this most important action of his life, the newly-reunited bond between them snapped.

"You do not appear to approve," he said shortly. "But may I ask you to keep your opinions of me to yourself?"

Robert turned his back and walked across the room to get a wholly unnecessary match.

"Yes. I'll do that," he said, and before either of them could speak again, Gaston came in. With his reception of the news Lionel, despite his irritability, could find no fault; the Frenchman was courteous and pleasant as ever, and if his words were formal and his tone lacked a certain warmth of enthusiasm, that was but the formality of his race.

It was later by three hours that the storm broke and upon Enid's head. She was preparing for bed and brushing her hair near the wood fire in her room, when a knock came at her door and Robert's voice asked admission; not wholly surprised, she gave it and the young man came in and stood before her.

"Enid—you've got to stop this. It can't be—it must not. Simone mustn't marry him!" He was white and haggard, his eyes so dilated that the iris was almost invisible; despite the effort he was making after self-control, his hands, clenching and unclenching, showed the nervous strain under which he was labouring. Enid put aside her brush, forced him gently into the chair opposite to her own, and spoke in as matter-of-fact a voice as she could command.

"Robert, you are talking foolishly. Lionel

has asked Simone to marry him; she has accepted. He is crazy over her and will not listen to any kind of criticism. What reason can you give that will stop the marriage?"

"He hates women—why has he fallen in love with Simone?"

Enid shrugged her shoulders.

"My dear, Lionel has never hated women. He has used them and despised them. Now he has met one whom he loves . . . heaven knows why, and heaven only. He is mad about her, was from the beginning. We all saw it, apparently, but you."

Robert leaned his head on his hands, running his fingers through his hair.

"He can't marry her—he shall not——"

"Robert!" Enid spoke sharply, "don't be melodramatic! How can you prevent it? Why should you prevent it? Does Simone belong to you?"

From behind his hands Robert's voice came hoarsely.

"I wish to God she did——"

"Robert! You really care as much as that?"

The young man raised his haggard face. He looked years older.

"A thousand times more!" he said brokenly. "But all the same, that is not the reason. I am

not low enough to grudge him happiness because it is out of my reach. That's not the reason—no."

"Can you tell me?" Enid said more gently, adding, after a moment: "Not that it will make any difference. Lionel is not a man to be turned from his own way."

Robert shook his head.

"No, I can't tell you . . . I only found out myself by an accident."

Enid was silent a moment, her face very grave. Then she said quietly:

"Is it a thing that would prevent you from marrying her yourself if she would accept you?"

"No, not for me—but for Lionel——" Robert said, and getting to his feet, went over to the window, pulled aside the curtains and pushed up the sash.

"How stifling this room is!" he exclaimed, and Enid made no demur, only pulling her fur-trimmed dressing-gown a little closer around her.

She had known for some time that Robert cared for Simone, and equally she was sure that Simone cared nothing for him; a younger son was not the game she sought for, neither would his splendid youth appeal to her save as a passing diversion. Lionel, with his sophistication, his cynical outlook on life, mingled with that recklessness that when roused cared for neither God

nor man, was more her mark; not only would his wealth appeal, but his physical type would please her with its virility and experience. Enid knew her world and she knew her brothers, even while leaving them very much alone.

It flashed through her mind that she was thankful for Simone's neglect of Robert; it would save him far greater suffering than her passion, and Lionel was hard enough himself to be able to meet her on equal terms; then ashamed of the thought she put it from her and looked across the room at Robert's back.

"We shall have to accept it," she said, in as matter-of-fact a tone as she could. "There is no sense in antagonizing Lionel—and he is infatuated. You were tactful, I hope?"

Robert turned round, his face very pale.

"I'm afraid he saw I wasn't pleased, but I don't imagine my opinion mattered one way or the other."

He spoke bitterly and Enid could hardly pretend to ignore the tone.

"My dear, how foolish of you! Besides, why think that? After all, you are brothers."

Robert was silent, but his young, handsome face looked drawn and tired and years older, and Enid, who secretly loved this young brother as she loved nothing else on earth, held out her hand to him.

"Robert, you're tired and upset over this affair," she said, more tenderly than she was wont to speak. "Go to bed and get some sleep. After all, we can do nothing, and they may get on very well."

He came over to her, took her hand and stood for a moment looking at her, then stooping kissed her.

"All right. I'll go. Forget what I said about her. I can only tell you that I'd marry her myself a thousand times over if she'd have me—so I suppose I needn't worry over Lionel. Good night——"

He went out of the room and Enid, left alone, went to the window and closed it, then came back to her seat and sat for awhile, very still, staring into the fire.

CHAPTER V

Dolores finished reading her letter and looked across the breakfast-table at her host in perplexity. It was just one month later, a bright deceptively warm morning, and the spring sunshine was pouring into the dining-room of Gaston's house in Wilton Crescent, where she, Gaston and Robert sat over breakfast.

"It's a letter from Nicolas," she said; "such an unexpected one—he never hardly writes to me, and this is to say he wants me to go to him—he's lending the house in Berkeley Square for Lionel's wedding. Isn't that thrilling?"

"For Lionel's wedding? Nicolas?" Gaston's eyebrows nearly reached his hair. "But why? He is not such a tremendous friend of Lionel's, surely?"

"I have never heard him talk of Lionel; but then I never see him—hardly ever, I mean," Dolores said amazedly. "Isn't it queer? But isn't it fun, too? Because I'm to go there and help as hostess."

"Help?" Gaston put the other matters aside or the moment. "Who are you to help?"

"Nicolas doesn't say."

"I had better ask Enid to see him," Gaston said, and glanced across at Robert. "Hertebury mightn't think of chaperoning Dolores," he added half-laughing, and returned to his paper; while Robert, with some muttered remark, got up and went out of the room, leaving the remainder of his breakfast untouched.

It was shortly after eleven, before Enid would be likely to be out on such an errand, that he arrived at Nicolas's house in Berkeley Square, was admitted, and asked to wait in the little morning-room at the side of the dark square hall that looked on to the Square trees, just now breaking into green.

The butler came back after two or three minutes and conducted him upstairs to a room at the back of the house, a big room that was half-library and half-boudoir, a strange room for a man and one that he had never been in before, for he and his cousin seldom saw one another. There was a fire burning, and beside it, in a large chair, sat a man who arose at his entrance and held out his hand—a man whose twisted back the silk folds of the dressing-gown did not disguise, and who bore the impress of much physical and mental stress on his face.

"Hullo, Robert!" he said. "Sorry to trouble

you to come upstairs, but I don't get up very early this weather. Do sit down."

"That's all right," Robert said, but he did not take the outstretched hand. "Thanks, I'd rather stand. I have come to ask you something unpleasant."

"Indeed?" The smile faded from the other's face and in its look came a sudden haughtiness, "what is it?"

Robert looked at the man before him and a queer sick feeling of helplessness seized him. After all, what could he do? No words of his could reach this hunchback whose brilliant dark eyes met his with cool mockery, and he could not employ force as he would to a man whole and strong as himself.

"Well?" his cousin's voice had the sharp command that he might have used to a delinquent valet. "I am waiting."

Robert's eyes, blue and steady, met the other's dark gaze.

"You have offered your house for my brother's wedding," he said slowly. "Why?"

Hertebury, sitting back in the chair, surveyed him with amazement not entirely assumed.

"My dear fellow," he said at last, "may I ask if this question is the reason of your visit?"

"You may," Robert said. "Because you know the answer is 'yes.' I have answered you, now

will you, in your turn, be kind enough to answer me?"

Hertebury's face, pale as ivory, not without a certain haggard beauty, gave no sign of what his true feelings were, and his words were spoken in a tone half-mocking, half-amused.

"Certainly, I will answer you," he said. "I will tell you that this house is mine to do as I like with and that I allow no one to dictate to me how I shall use it. Is that quite clear? Because, if not, I will make my meaning clearer."

Robert bit his lip; he was young and at a white heat of generous anger, an ill match for the man before him.

"It is quite clear," he said, and his voice shook a little with the effort he was making after self-control. "And, since we are speaking plainly, I tell you you are a blackguard and a scoundrel. That any man worthy the name would not flaunt his intrigues at such a time and in such a way—you are not fit to be amongst decent people——"

"Perhaps not. That is a matter of opinion. If we come to matters such as behaviour, it is hardly the act of a decent person—I use your adjective, you see, as you are evidently a judge of what constitutes decency—to force yourself into my house and insult me."

Robert clenched his hands.

"It would be impossible to insult you," he said furiously. "Do you understand that? Will you stop this invitation, or will you not?"

Hertebury's face twitched a little, but it was the only sign he gave that he heeded Robert's words.

"I most certainly will not," he said; "and may I ask if your brother sent you here to make this request?"

"My brother?" For an instant Robert stared at him uncomprehendingly, then the colour surged into his face.

"You damned cad!" he exclaimed furiously, "if you were not what you are you would not dare to ask me such a question. Do you think if my brother knew the truth he would enter your house? Even meet you again? Being what you are you know I can't repay you as you deserve."

He had got beneath Hertebury's guard at last —a faint dull red crept under his cousin's pallor, then faded, his eyes glittered and his lips moved although no words were audible . . . for fully a minute the two faced one another in silence, then the elder man got to his feet and going across the room opened the door.

"Go!" he said thickly, "go; do you hear me?" And Robert knowing that there was no more to be said, that he had failed, went.

Hertebury stood quite still, till in the remote

distance he heard the muffled closing of the hall door, then he rang the bell and when the man came, said hoarsely:

"Tell Mr. Johnson to send the remainder of the invitations by hand immediately. He is to have them all delivered by noon, giving the change of address to this house."

The man bowed.

"Very good, your Grace," and went away; and Nicolas, standing by the chair Robert had refused to use, laughed aloud.

"Your Grace!" he cried. "Your Grace! Grace! My God, what a joke, what an exquisitely humorous joke——" and his laugh ended suddenly, and dropping into a chair he sat staring grimly at the opposite wall, forgetful already of his cousin's words, seeing only the face of Simone St. Auban. And in the street and the spring sunshine Robert walked fast, cursing himself for being a fool, aware that he had made matters worse rather than better, and came, not a hundred yards from Piccadilly, as he strode up Berkeley Street, full upon Simone and Lionel walking together.

They stopped at once. Lionel looked him up and down and raised quizzical brows.

"Whither away looking like a thundercloud?" he inquired. "Ajax defying the lightning, eh, Simone?"

"I think he looks very charming," Simone said smiling faintly. "No doubt—he has affairs of importance."

"We are just on our way to see Nicolas," she added before he could answer. "You know he has suddenly lent us Hertebury House for the wedding and insisted on our cancelling all other arrangements?"

Robert felt his mouth dry, but he managed to answer stiffly enough:

"Yes. I heard this morning," he said, through lips that felt as though they belonged to someone else, and Lionel glanced at Simone jealously.

"Very good of him, eh, Robert? We are now going to say, 'thank you,' prettily. Much pleasanter than a wretched hotel."

Robert nodded.

"Yes. Yes, of course. If you'll excuse me, I'm in rather a hurry."

He felt, rather than saw their surprise, but taking no heed of it raised his hat and strode away, and Lionel, frowning, stared after him.

"The damned young puppy!" he said through set teeth, "what does he mean by behaving like that?"

Whereupon Simone laughed lightly and patted his arm.

"My dear Lionel, do not be so truculent.

Why should Robert stand and talk to us, after all? He's got his own affairs to attend to, even though I am going to marry you next Tuesday."

Her sense calmed him and he laughed, seeing the absurdity of his attitude.

"That's so. Next Tuesday . . . Simone, I can't believe it——"

"You had better try, or you will have so great a shock!" she said. "And now, *mon cher*, when we have seen Nicolas I must leave you, because I have a fitting quite close by, and after that I go to Mrs. Portman's luncheon."

"That means I shall not see you till the opera?"

"I fear so! But how good for you! Ah, here we are—this is so beautiful a house. The most beautiful in all the squares of London, I think——"

Half an hour later Lionel left her at the shop in Bond Street where she was to have her fitting, and went on down to his club in Piccadilly; and hardly had he left the place than Simone spoke to the *vendeuse* who was awaiting her.

"I am too tired—I can't stand to be fitted to-day. I'll send word and you can arrange for the fitter to come round this evening before dinner——" and once outside in the street she took a hansom back to Hertebury House and was shown there, not into the room where Robert's

painful interview had taken place, but into a bigger room on the ground floor also at the back, a room finished with luxury and exquisite Italian pieces, a setting that fitted her beauty—a room for which she herself had chosen everything one year when, discreetly, they had travelled in Italy.

She was not kept waiting; two minutes after Walters had closed the doors, they reopened to admit the Duke himself, fully dressed now and no trace of that scene of anger in his face. He hurried towards her, and with the sneer wiped from his lips and the hard glitter from his eyes, it was possible to see the beauty that in happier circumstances of health should have been his.

"Simone, I thought you would come back" —he put her gently into a chair. "I was waiting."

She looked up at him as he stood beside her.

"Yes. There are several things I wish to speak about. Lionel intends to go to Panama."

"To Panama? In heaven's name, why?"

"As you say—why? He has talked of it several times, but I was not interested. Now it seems that he was serious and that he intends to go there immediately we return from Capri."

"Capri?" Hertebury's face went a curious ashen hue. "Are you going to Italy with him?"

"My dear Nicolas, of course. After all, I

am marrying him. I can hardly refuse to accompany him on the honeymoon."

"But Capri——" his voice was stifled. "Capri —why there——"

"He wished it, and it is beautiful."

Her tone held a finality he knew of old, and remembering the man he had just seen, a blind anger mingled with his pain—of what good was his great wealth, his ancient title, when his body was so twisted, his health so miserable a thing? Looking at the exquisite woman before him the old fear, that deep in his heart he dreaded to face, shot through him. What if he lost her utterly, what if even his lavish extravagance, his utmost devotion failed to hold her . . . the picture held an anguish of desolation that he could not contemplate; and yet, with the innate perversity that governed him, he knew he would never marry her, even if she for ever remained free. That status of legal and social integrity was not for him and her—he would leave no child to inherit his disabilities. For years he had realized the possibility of her remarriage, but he had allowed her assurance that nothing should be changed to quiet anxiety; it was a very different thing, however, thinking and imagining; to face in actuality the man who in the eyes of the world, would have the rights he had himself so treasured. And

this man, whom he had met years before, was no weakling, no easy-going careless idler, but one in whose eyes and jaw he read a determination and force equal to most of the difficulties of life. Lionel Kent was a dangerous man and he was infatuated with Simone; that was for the whole world to read. Hertebury knew pitifully well the unwisdom of remonstrating; Simone had no tenderness or affection—only passion—as he had learned years ago. That he had satisfied, despite his deformity, perhaps—though he refused fiercely, even to himself, to admit the possibility—because of it; but there was more than passion on his side. Twisted mentally as well as physically, he, nevertheless, loved her to the exclusion of all else; and his love was an anguish since she was incapable of real love for any human being, and he knew it.

Now, however, at her calm assumption that he would accept even this last piece of news with equanimity, he was stung into unwise speech:

"So you will repeat the experience of Capri with a husband instead of a lover? You had all Europe to choose from!"

She eyed him intently for a moment, then changing tone and attitude, leaned forward and laid a hand on his arm.

"Nicolas, how cruel of you—haven't we discussed this matter before and always we have

both realized that my marriage was a possibility. As for Capri—nothing can wipe out my memories—you should know that; and Lionel is a difficult man. I must, for my own sake, do as he wishes in some things. As for Panama, surely nothing could be better? He cannot expect me to accompany him there."

Hertebury lifted her hand and laid his cheek down upon it.

"He may," he said. "And if he does you will go."

"Not for long, I assure you. Perhaps not at all. Nicolas, be sensible!"

"Sensible?" his voice was stifled. "Do you expect me to welcome this marriage?"

"No. But I expect you to think of me and realize that I must conform, to a certain extent, to my husband's plans."

He looked at her intently for a moment.

"There's one thing," he said, "that I want you to remember. I'll never give you up, do you understand that? Never! I owe nothing to Kent and I refuse to consider him at all where you are concerned. If I can take you from him I will, by fair means or foul—which it is has simply ceased to matter. Without you life means nothing, and I am giving you warning."

"You know nothing changes my feelings for you," she said, in a low, sweet voice. "Have I not come here this morning to tell you so, dearest? And I must not stay; I have a luncheon engagement and half-a-hundred things to do."

He drew her to him with a force surprising in his twisted frame.

"You cannot go just at once," he said thickly. "This may be our last meeting alone before Thursday. Simone, I adore you—I will never let you go—do you understand that?"

If she did, and if for the first time a pang of anxiety shot through her mind, it was only for an instant and he did not guess its coming; instead she submitted to his caresses, and it was half-an-hour later before, with no pretence of hurry, he accompanied her to the hall and stood there while Walters put her into a hansom.

It was Lady Flora who finally persuaded Nicolas to abandon his idea of having his young sister play hostess—the child would be burdened, she assured him, since she was not young enough to be entirely unselfconscious and not old enough to take the responsibility capably. She suggested herself in place, and Nicolas, who had merely yielded to a whim, agreed, on condition that she should stay at Hertebury House with Dolores, which she willingly consented to do; and on the morning of

the wedding Dolores woke to realize that the great day had come, that Lionel was to be taken completely out of her life and by a woman she hated, young as she was.

She was child enough to feel that this was the end of all things, that never again would she see Lionel except in the company of Simone St. Auban, and, if by any chance she did, he would no longer be her own special friend, because he would care about no one but Simone. Despite the fact that she was to be a bridesmaid, it was a sober Dolores who breakfasted alone in the little morning-room where Robert had waited. Hertebury House seemed less of home even than Aunt Flora's comfortably stodgy Victorian mansion; Nicolas, her brother, she had only seen for a few minutes the previous evening; so that it was all the more surprising to receive a message just as she was leaving the table.

"His Grace would be much obliged if your ladyship would go to his room when breakfast is finished."

"I've finished now," Dolores said. "Tell his Grace I'll be there in five minutes, Walters;" and five minutes later she tapped at her brother's dressing-room door and was admitted by his Italian valet Giovanni, who had been the late Duke's personal servant. Dolores had not seen him for years, and at sight of his olive face and beaming

dark eyes she felt suddenly like a little girl again going to see the father she loved.

"Giovanni—oh, Giovanni!" she held out her hands to him smiling, yet with sudden quick tears in her eyes, so vivid was memory and so much had he been a part of her radiant childhood, and Giovanni carried her hands to his lips and crooned over them like a mother over her child, a flood of soft, eager words attesting his affection; then Dolores, always ill at ease with the brother, who was in reality a stranger, drew away.

"I must go in—talk to me after the wedding —his Grace will be cross if he's kept waiting— dear Giovanni, it's so good to see you again."

"My dear signorina—my little lady of grace——" he was openly affected, for he had loved the late Duke as only an Italian servant can love, and this child he had carried in his arms when she was only two hours old—"Yes—his Grace will not be pleased, *scusi, scusi!*—I see you again," and Dolores walked past him to the bedroom door, tapped and, in answer to a curt "Come in!" entered and closed it behind her. The big panelled room was dimmed by sun-blinds despite the earliness of the year, and for a second she hesitated, before she saw that Nicolas was still in bed, and in that second Nicolas saw the little sister he had so neglected as a slender young

girl—in reality a child still, in her simple frock with the golden-brown hair falling loosely on her shoulders; yet a child with more than a hint of what she would one day become, an exquisite woman—and seeing, was startled. He gave no sign, however, but merely spoke her name, and Dolores started and came hurriedly across to the big four-poster bed.

"You sent for me?" she said. "How are you? Is there anything you want me to do?"

He signed to her to sit down close by, facing him.

"Yes. I want you to take a note to Madame St. Auban and give it her yourself when you see her first, either before or after the marriage. Please do this unobtrusively."

A little surprised, she nodded.

"Of course I will. But won't you see her yourself?"

"I may do so, but it will not be easy for me to move quickly, and I want her to have it just at the first moment she is by herself. It is to wish her happiness. She is—an old friend."

"Is she?" Dolores' tone was non-committal. She did not want to hear anything about Simone. "I will do it."

"Thank you. Here it is. Are you looking forward to being a bridesmaid?"

He was trying to make friends, to "talk down," and Dolores saw it and felt less strange with him, realizing that he, like herself, was ill at ease.

"Not very much," she said candidly. "You see, I—I am sorry, but I do not like Madame St. Auban very much, and I wish Lionel was not going to marry her."

Nicolas pulled himself higher on the pillows.

"Indeed?" he said and his face lost its bland boredom. "And why?"

"She is not sincere," Dolores said. "I feel she is—oh so different to Gaston. She is nice, but she is waiting to be nasty. And Lionel will hate that. Robert hates it now."

"You are frank. Are you not afraid I will repeat this to her?"

Dolores looked at him in amazement.

"Of course not. You are my brother. You could not repeat to an outsider what I have told you in confidence."

Her answer, so staid, and yet so childlike in its simplicity, amazed him; he looked at her curiously.

"So you have sufficient faith in me for that?" he said, after a moment, and quite suddenly she smiled.

"Yes," she said, "yes, Nicolas."

He nodded as if to himself, then spoke with sudden harshness.

"What makes you think Robert dislikes Lionel's marriage to Madame St. Auban?"

Dolores was too interested to be disturbed by his change of mood or peremptory manner; forsaking the chair she curled up on the edge of the bed itself, nearer to him.

"I don't know," she said, serious eyes on his. "But he does. And Lionel—Lionel won't be happy—he can't be. He—he is so different you see. Most people think he is hard and rather selfish, but he's not. He——" she broke off abruptly, and equally abruptly her brother questioned her.

"Well? He—what?"

"He was staying at Wyverns when Daddy was killed. He stayed with me all the time. Don't you remember you got home from Vienna a few hours before he went? Well, he'd been with me and he was—was just wonderful. Oh, Nicolas, can't you stop him marrying her? She'll spoil everything for him—even Panama!"

For the moment she had forgotten to whom she was speaking, forgotten that she had never before broken through her reticence with regard to Lionel, forgotten everything but her half-childish, half-womanly fear for his future, a fear purely instinctive and quite unreasoning. But, Nicolas did not know that; he was amazed first, then amused, then curious.

Reaching out for the cigarettes that were beside his bed he lit one, watching her.

"Why do you ask me?" he inquired. "What have I to do with Madame St. Auban's affairs?"

She put out her hand and laid it on his arm.

"You said she was a friend of yours. People listen to their friends——"

"You speak as though Lionel were a friend of yours, too."

"He is—oh, he is!"

"Then——?"

"I'm too young," Dolores said mournfully. "I'm sixteen, but he thinks I'm about twelve still. Besides—men never seem to speak to other men about those sort of things. Things to do with friends, I mean. I remember Daddy once saying that it's best the other way."

"He's in love with her."

"I know. That's what makes it so dreadful."

"Dreadful?" Hertebury's voice was sharp. "What on earth do you mean? What do you know about being in love?"

Dolores shook her head.

"Nothing. I suppose I will some day. What is it, Nicolas? What makes people so strange? So blind?"

He looked at her for a moment intently; then said curtly:

"You'd better ask Enid. I don't wonder Lionel thinks you are twelve."

"Enid?" In her amazement Dolores had passed by the last wounding sentence. "Why Enid? What is there you cannot tell me? You've been in love, haven't you, Nicolas?"

He regarded the tip of his cigarette for a moment.

"Yes," he said in an expressionless voice, "I've been in love . . . it is not always a very desirable state."

Dolores, quick to sense unhappiness in others, noticed the change of tone, saw the indefinable alteration in his face. Slipping down from her perch on his bed she went to his side and touched his shoulder.

"I'm sorry," she said, and her voice was tender. "Poor Nicolas"— and bending her head she kissed him—in so far as she could remember for the first time in her life.

She felt him start and draw away from her, then suddenly he leaned back so that he rested against her young breast, and turning his head, hid his face there and cried.

For a second she could not believe it . . . Could not recognize Nicolas in this stranger . . . Nicolas crying . . . then she put her arm round him, the eternal mother comforting the child, while in her heart was borne a sense of tragedy, a

sudden new fear of life that hitherto, except for the natural grief of her father's death, had presented to her a smiling face.

So love was not happiness—love meant this agony that racked the man in her young arms, love meant the look of strain and fierceness she had seen so often on Lionel's face, love meant storm and pain and—dimly the knowledge came—renunciation. And in that hour Dolores' childhood died, and she entered into the kingdom of her womanhood.

A knock brought her to the realization that no one must see Nicolas like this, and going swiftly across to the door she opened it and stood on the threshold to see Giovanni waiting.

"It is a message from Madame de Melancourt," he said. "Madame wishes your ladyship to call at Wilton Crescent, if you can do so, before noon."

"Tell her I will come—and tell Ellis to be ready to go with me, please, Giovanni," Dolores said and closed the door, to find Nicolas white and haggard, but once more his own master; and as she approached he put out his hand and pulled her down to kiss her, then as roughly pushed her away, and with a touch on his hair, strangely mature in its tenderness, she left him.

She walked to Wilton Crescent despite Ellis's

black looks—Ellis was Lady Flora's maid, told off to accompany her during these few strange days—facing the world with eyes grown, in an hour, older and more wistful, a loveliness deepening in her face, as if, minute by minute, her spirit were awakening.

London was gay and sunny, the streets and pavements crowded—the house in Wilton Crescent bright with flowers in the window boxes; within she ran upstairs to find Enid, relieved to be out of the stately gloom of Hertebury House, and Enid, as she entered the drawing-room, looked up from her little bureau and smiled her greeting.

"That's right, but it was not I but Lionel who wanted you," she said. "Why, Dolores, my dear, you look—different. What is it? Has anything happened?"

Quickly defensive, Dolores shook her head.

"Different? How? Nothing could happen, could it, Enid? Perhaps I look excited about the wedding, and what does Lionel want me for?"

"He is in Gaston's study," Enid said. "Go to him, dear," and Dolores went.

In the study, ostensibly finishing one or two important letters, in reality pacing restlessly up and down for the first time in his life, as nervously excited as a young man on the verge of his first amorous adventure, Lione was unable to settle to

anything that required work or concentration. Yet, when Dolores' flower-like face appeared and she said half-shyly: "Enid said you wanted me?" he smiled and held out his left hand.

"Yes I did. I have something for you and I thought I would give it to you before the others had theirs——"

Taking out of his pocket a little case he opened it and showed to her a string of pearls, not large, but of exquisite colour and symmetry.

"This is to remember me by, little Dolores," he said with strange gentleness, and lifting it, took off her hat and fastened the clasp under her soft curls. "There it is—like the others, you will have a bracelet, but this is from me to you, because we have been friends, you and me——"

"Have been——" she could say nothing because of the ache in her throat, and at her silence Lionel looked at her and lifted his eyebrows.

"You don't care about jewels? Enid said you were too young——"

Her youth flared up, blotting out even her misery at so tactless a remark, and she turned on him with cheeks flaming.

"Of course I care about them. I'm not too young! I think they're beautiful—more beautiful than anything I've ever had in my whole life—only—only—oh, I wish you hadn't said that—to

remember you! As if I ever wanted anything to make me remember?"

It was a child's cry now of sheer despair, and amazed at its poignancy he took her by the shoulders and looked down into her eyes that were dazzled by tears she would not let fall.

"Why, Dolores!" he said, "I did not mean it that way! Why, my dear, I know—it was only meant as a special little thing between us—something of your very own because of our friendship—Dear little Dolores, don't look like that!"

He took her into his arms and kissed her as he would have kissed her four years ago, and Dolores stayed there for one long moment, then, all the colour gone from her face, drew back and smiled at him.

"I see—I thought you meant you didn't care about us being friends any more now that you've got Madame St. Auban . . . forgive me being stupid."

"You would never be stupid," he said and pulled a soft strand of her hair. "There—that's better, sweetheart—I shall see you when we come back from Capri. Wish me luck."

"All the luck in the world!" she said, and held out her hand. "God bless you, cousin Lionel . . . and come back soon."

CHAPTER VI

A MAN stood on the hillside on the edge of a little hollow, a burnt-out briar between his teeth, his light, steel-blue eyes gazing intently at the slope above him.

It repaid consideration if only for what it represented, the unchanged jungle, dense, sinister, unbelievable in its strength, through which four centuries ago Balboa had hewed his path to immortal fame. Vines, palms, grasses and creepers of all varieties, leaves hanging from grotesquely-twisted branches and trunks, mosses, grey and thick, giant-size ferns, bizarre orchids, vivid splotches of yellow and orange from strange fungus, and stranger flowers—a riot of green splashed here and there with colour, its shade a menace, its depth the home of lizards, tapirs, insects innumerable, and venomous snakes.

Not a breath stirred the heavy dampness of the air, and the hum of a myriad insects sounded amazingly loud in and about the rotting vegetation, where the new and riotous creepers forever strangled the older growth; but gradually, as the

ear became accustomed to the curious droning stillness, other sounds, far-away, yet unmistakably human, broke ever and anon across the jungle —the clang of steel upon steel, the shriek of steam-whistles, occasionally the rumble of wagon-wheels upon rails. Yet all these sounds were far off, infinitely remote from the ages-old jungle, primeval and untouched by modern life, and the man who stood there, a forceful figure in his khaki-flannel shirt and cord-breeches, seemed oddly a link between the two.

At his feet there was a little pool of black, stagnant water, half-hidden by moss and fallen leaves, its surface scum-covered—a pest-hole bearing death and disaster, the cause of the frown that drew his brows together and deepened the lines in his clean-shaven, determined face.

Presently he took the pipe from his mouth, knocked its ashes out on his heel and plunged down a narrow track up which he had climbed more than half an hour ago, still frowning, for the burden on his powerful shoulders was a heavy one, and the lives of those myriads of workers, hundreds of feet below in that valley where the clang of steel and the shriek of whistles arose, depended on his being able to carry it effectually.

He came out through the lesser tangled jungle on to a steep path, and below him was an amazing

scene, a great cut through the hills in the process of making, with a railroad running beside it, the scarps of the cliffs above scored with buildings, machinery, narrow-gauge lines where trucks of earth and shunting engines went tirelessly about their business, huts, cranes, steam-shovels, sloping banks where swarms of men worked ant-like, girders stretched across gaps, temporary bridges, vast heaps of raw earth, and beyond and above, the hillsides, the jungle, a glimpse of sky.

An amazing incredible sight. The conquering of the Isthmus of Panama, the vision of a dream changing into a reality, through the courage and the patience and the sacrifice of a few men. . . .

Lionel Kent came to a standstill again and stood with his hands at his ribs, thumbs to the front, shoulders hunched a little forward, legs slightly apart. It was a habit of his, this posture, and there was a certain truculence in the attitude that was characteristic of the man.

He did not look for trouble—trouble came without that—but he was more than ready for it; and his staff had learned the signs and were ready for it, too, when he stood looking about him with eyes curiously light in his bronzed, powerful face.

It was late afternoon in September 1904, and gaspingly hot with a humidity that baffled all

scientific figures, and over the vast ditch with its swarming workers, over the dense jungle behind, and the Pacific Ocean away to the east—curious anomaly of Nature, yet true—brooded a suffocating dampness that was almost tangible.

Kent halted again, looking at the scene before him; a month or two ago the French had been still in possession of the property and the Americans had been their guests; on May 4th the property had been formally transferred to the representatives of the United States; and in the middle weeks of June, Colonel Crawford, as chief sanitary officer for the Isthmus, had arrived with his staff, and Kent with three others had arrived in September.

The task was a Herculean one for both engineers and sanitary authorities; at home, the Commission fought over the plans of sea-level versus a lock canal, it was also certain that if the Americans suffered as terribly from disease as did the French fifteen years before, a second failure, on as great and tragic a scale as the first, was inevitable.

Kent had been on the Isthmus some time, and to-day he had gone for a solitary tramp as much to straighten out his ideas and prepare for the future as to gain detailed information about the difficulties that lay ahead.

Simone, for the time being, was in New York, exploring that city, and being entertained royally, for it had been Lionel's own suggestion that she stay behind on this, his first visit; for he had carried out his project and, gaining an appointment on Colonel Crawford's staff, was prepared to remain at the Isthmus until the great dream Canal was an accomplished fact.

Simone had been unexpectedly compliant. Her marriage had opened the door to a life utterly different to anything she had previously experienced and, since novelty was the breath of existence to her, she welcomed the complete change of habits and surroundings. She had visited the house in New England, where Lionel's mother had gone as a bride, and professed herself charmed; New York and Washington had given her of their best; and when Lionel talked over once again his plans for Panama and work there, she made no difficulties. Panama offered change and possible excitement and while it was necessary for Lionel to go in advance, she was quite willing to follow him in a few months at the latest. Yet it was not that she welcomed the separation; on the contrary. The effect that Lionel had had upon her before marriage was infinitely greater now; but she was aware of her danger in submitting herself too utterly to the domination of the senses when the

man in question was her husband, and, in order to keep the hold over herself that had never before been in danger, she chose to stay behind for a while, until he should be desperate for her arrival.

As for Lionel, it was with the strangest confusion of feeling that he left his three-months wife in the north and travelled to the Isthmus in the train of Colonel Crawford. He still desired her most passionately, but he was far too honest with himself, far too cynically aware of his own vices and virtues, not to know that such a marriage as his left strange gaps in the warp and woof of real happiness. Already he knew Simone as devoid of tenderness or affection, and while, as a general rule, he needed neither quality, he was aware that the time might come when he would desperately long for both.

Physically his marriage was an amazing thing, mentally it had its moments of interest, but he knew that the whole fabric of their united loves was utterly devoid of real love.

Already, since he had been on the Isthmus, there were moments when such knowledge threatened suffering, but for the present all was well, and just now he was working too hard and living too strenuously for the separation and enforced continence to be unbearable.

It was a matter, too, for congratulation, that

Robert had obtained his heart's desire and was arriving at Colon this very evening by boat from New York, and later he went to meet him.

It was not till the very indifferent dinner was over and the two sat over coffee and cigars that Robert began to talk, first to give messages sent from Simone, then to read a long letter from Enid, finally to discuss the matter of the Canal.

"They are fighting now over the details when the whole wants adjusting," he said. "You've all the latest news, really. You know they've appointed John Findley Wallace as chief engineer."

"Yes. And as you know, also, there are five hundred men at work already on the excavation work at Culebra Cut. I was watching 'em this afternoon. Well—we've made a beginning, and if anything can carry it through to a success it will be Crawford's work. You'll see to-morrow what he's up against."

"Fever as bad as ever?"

"Why not?" Lionel said laconically. "This place is heaven for the mosquitoes. Dense jungle, tremendous rainfall—a climate like an orchid-house. But Crawford cleaned up Havana, and he'll clean up the Isthmus if he's given a fair chance."

"If!" Robert said shortly. "It's a big 'if.' I want to get across as far as I can to-morrow."

"You'll have to go along the railroad track, then. It's about fifteen feet wide most of the way. Just a track with the jungle up to its very edges. Wallace has his work cut out for him—so have you all."

"There are plenty of the French stores left here still, I understand," Robert said. "Railroad stock and other machinery, isn't that so?"

"Any amount, back in the jungle. But nobody knows if it's fit to be used or not. My God! we're up against a big thing for success or failure."

"What about the old French Canal?"

"Just a ditch, stagnant and narrow, running back from Colon here to the Gatun Hills. How deep or wide it was nobody seems to know. Probably it's tremendously filled up. Of course there are all sorts of French documents, but we're not to know if those documents are to be relied upon."

"Well, we're under orders to finish the surveys and check up the French plans, and it's on our surveys that the decision of the level is to be made. It ought not to be so difficult."

"Not if you can get the Commission to realize what an enormous piece of work the whole thing is and so not hamper us by red tape."

"Which, of course, is an impossibility for the official mind. They've got to have it. Every-

one at home seemed to be having a fit lest money should be wasted."

"There are plenty of requisitions going through," Lionel said, pushing his cigarette case across the table to his brother. "Crawford has plans for furnishing running water for Panama, and he wants a thousand and one other things."

"Let's hope he gets 'em. If you read the articles in the home papers and heard the talk, you'd realize he's got a tough job."

"The Canal is a tough job," Lionel retorted. "The Commission here is well under way for a sea-level Canal."

Robert leaned his arms on the table.

"They're wrong!" he said eagerly. "I'm certain they're wrong on the sea-level idea. You've got the tremendous variation of the tides for one thing, the Chagres river flowing dead across the Canal for another, and the darn thing'll rise twenty feet in a couple of hours or so when it rains heavily, which it does most days in the year, to say nothing of other smaller streams all given to flooding. What are you going to do about that?"

"The Commission appears to be going forward on the scheme, anyhow," Lionel replied. "They've kept a nucleus at work since the French failure—there have been five hundred at work on Culebra since then. They've excavated down to within

150 feet of sea-level—had already when we took over."

Robert shrugged.

"Oh, well—Wallace is a good man. He'll make use of it either way. We've got our work cut out whichever way the big-wigs at home decide—the jungle has got to be cleared—there are masses of machinery literally overgrown with vegetation and most of it will be useful."

Lionel nodded; absolutely as he believed in Crawford and his methods, the state of the Isthmus and the work to be done on it, if the American effort was not to be a replica of the French failure, were enough to appal anyone on the spot who knew something of Government methods. He was English enough to recognize the weakness of the American public's point of view, the desire to "see the dirt fly," which point of view he had heard Wallace was doing his best to satisfy; and he was American enough to sympathize with that desire, and to believe that it arose out of a grim determination to see this job through to a finish at whatever cost.

That the levels were not yet decided upon did not seem to him the catastrophe that it did to Robert, who, as an engineer, naturally wished everything to be straightforwardly settled, so that the work could go ahead without interruption.

He, on the contrary, could not but see the danger of bringing large numbers of men to the Isthmus until some of Crawford's sanitary measures could be brought into play. Yellow fever was rife in the Isthmus, and Crawford had a far harder job than at Havana, owing to the difficulty of getting supplies from the Home Government, and the hampering desires of economy at Washington, and the public's desire to see "the dirt fly," as Robert had quoted, rather than spend many thousands of dollars on such dull material as insect powder and sulphur—Crawford had already put in a requisition for eight tons of the former, and Lionel could imagine the shock of horror Washington would experience at such a request.

His walk that afternoon, one of many, had shown him with hideous plainness the danger that awaited the American forces, more especially if they should arrive *en masse* before Crawford had time to commence a campaign of sanitary reform.

The silence into which he had relapsed after Robert's last speech aroused his brother's curiosity, and in answer to his question he endeavoured to explain his thoughts.

"Look here, Robert," he said, "I understand well enough that all this delay and muddle and argument is damned unsatisfactory, but what about the sanitary delays? Crawford has put in requi-

sitions for iron water-mains—think he'll get them? Next year, perhaps; yet everyone of those men at home would admit it if he were asked the question, that uncontaminated water is a necessity for health —hullo—come in!"

He broke off his speech to welcome the man who had knocked at the door, a big, lean Virginian, with blue eyes and a little, cropped moustache, by name Jack Holden, who, when Robert was introduced, nodded and held out his hand.

"Glad to meet you. Your brother's told me you're drafted to Culebra. Been hearing all the scandal of the Isthmus?" then, without waiting for an answer, he turned to Lionel.

"Got some news for you," he said laconically. "Ten more cases of fever in Panama to-day and eighteen at Colon. How's that for cheering us up?"

Kent looked at him sharply.

"After the second fumigation? No doubt?"

"None whatever. Chief's figures."

"Damnation!"

"Quite so——" turning to the younger man, who had been listening in some perplexity, he exclaimed in his casual drawl.

"The chief adopted his Havana methods naturally, and fumigated every house in Panama. It took us about a month. Cases of fever recurred

so we did it again—by all rights, every infected mosquito ought to be dead and buried, and here are fresh cases of fever developing—bit of a puzzle, isn't it?"

Robert nodded.

"More than a bit. What's the big idea next?"

"Fumigate again. That's what I came to say——" he glanced across at Lionel. "We're under orders to start again in the morning. You for Colon with your men—same as before. The amusing thing"— the bitterness in his voice belied his words—"is that the chief's just had a stinker from Washington as to the wildness of his requisition and the appalling extravagance of his sanitation schemes. When they get the requisition that's crossed their precious letter, urging again for pipes for water-mains, I'd like to hear what they say."

"And if you turned off their water supply at home they'd raise hell," Robert said. "Oh, Washington'll get some shocks before we're all through."

"The Commission is to blame more than Washington," Lionel interrupted. "After all, the authorities there can't know details; but the Commission has seen the Isthmus. There is only one member who has stayed here all the time and knows the real difficulties facing us. That's the Governor, General Davis. He's supported Crawford magnificently."

Holden nodded.

"You're right there. I suppose your brother here wants to get at the other side of the job?"

"Well—naturally I do," Robert said with a grin. "After all, mosquitoes and fever aren't my affair. Mine's simpler; but we're up against delays and opposition, too."

"I know that, but we don't want to follow the French figures. Don't you understand that if our fellows are subject to yellow jack to any extent we'll have the greatest difficulty in keeping an American force here at all?"

His words startled Robert, who answered with some heat.

"What do you mean? Think they'd quit?"

"Of course they'd quit! We'd have first of all to increase wages as an inducement to such an extent that the Canal would cost the earth. Then Congress probably would interfere and refuse to sanction the continuance of a work that cost fifteen or sixteen hundred American lives every few months."

"But we've started the job. Everyone knows what they've got to face."

"Do they?" Holden said grimly. "I doubt it. Look here, Kent, the French figures are pretty appalling, and they went into it just as

determined to make a success as we did. About one-third of their entire white force died yearly. What about that? Pretty stiff figures, aren't they?"

"Good lord!" Robert said staring, "Is that accurate?"

"Just about. May be a little on the side of putting the figures too low. Makes you realize what we're up against, doesn't it?"

"Crawford cleaned up Havana. He'll clean up the Isthmus if they'll let him," Lionel said, and shouted for a boy to bring them drinks. He wished Holden had not come just at that moment, wished he had not chosen to mention the increasing dangers of the Canal's construction before Robert. But Robert, for the moment too interested to be anything but forgetful, went back persistently to the subject, as the coloured boy put glasses and drinks on the stained rickety table before them.

"The Commission knows those figures after all," he said. "They will surely support the department now they realize the risk."

"Well, if they don't——" Holden paused significantly, his glass half-way to his lips. "If they don't—it's good-bye to the Canal and a rush for the boats that'll be a case of devil take the hindermost. Remember Havana? We didn't

pray to stay there, did we? I remember hearing there was a bit of a hurry to get into the home drafts."

"Where the hell's that boy?" Lionel said harshly. "This glass is filthy. Robert, shout for him."

Robert got up without a word and went over to the door, but Lionel had seen his face, and his own hardened. Yet he could not but admire his brother's bearing, for Robert came straight back to the table, his face very white, his eyes dilated, but his head up and a look about his mouth that was new to its beautiful sensitive lines; a hardness and a determination that changed his whole expression and drove from him the last of his youth.

Holden, still following his own train of thought, continued with his subject:

"Get a panic started on the Canal and you'll have a second and worse failure, as I said before," he went on. "Crawford has got to be supported —we've got to get the Isthmus cleaned up. Have you been about at all, Kent? Seen the jungle?"

Lionel nodded.

"Yes," he said curtly. "The railroad is overgrown in places with weeds and creepers—it means grinding work, they tell me, all the time to keep even the old ditch clear—that's all that

remains across the Isthmus of the French work—a ditch. Except at Culebra."

"Don't you see that's exactly what I was arguing?" Robert said, turning in his seat a little until he was partly back to his brother. "If they don't settle the levels, how can any force of man, even with the most skilled engineers in the world, get to work to clear the jungle—and if you don't clear the jungle——"

"That's to be seen," Lionel interrupted. "No one is quite sure how much the jungle has to do with the fever except Crawford and those of us who've seen what he did. You've got to convince the Commission, and every village has got to be cleaned up and every native trained into some sort of decent behaviour. I'm with Holden, Robert. Until the sanitary department really gets to work and is allowed to expend what is necessary, it's useless to bring thousands of men here. You're only asking for trouble."

The argument went on, repeating itself as such arguments will, and it was late before Holden bade the other two good night and went off to his lodgings, leaving the brothers alone. Anxious to avoid any further personal conversation, Lionel yawned profoundly, suggested bed, and added casually as they parted at the rickety door:

"You're going to Culebra, I understand. To-

morrow I'm for Ancon Hospital and a general meeting to arrange details. Then, I suppose, to this Colon fumigation. Shall I see you before you leave?"

"I suppose so. By the way—Lionel——"

"Yes?" Lionel paused unwillingly, afraid that Robert was going to refer to that unfortunate remark of Holden's, but he need not have feared.

"About Simone. She is expecting to come down here pretty soon . . . to Panama. She has made up her mind, if you don't send for her, that she'll come the boat after next."

"Simone? Good lord, it's impossible. Not yet. It's not safe."

"She won't hear of that. Says she has been to several places where there is yellow fever and malaria before now and—if I were you, I'd arrange something."

The elder man frowned.

"What, I wonder? Besides she'd be bored. Simone is used to civilization."

"She's your wife," Robert said rather dully, and his brother shot a keen glance at him, then shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll write to her more fully to-night," he said, and turned away to his own room, there to light a pipe and sit down on the edge of the bed

staring at the floor from beneath frowning brows. It was not that he did not want Simone. In some ways he wanted her desperately, for his months of marriage had loosened the bonds of self-discipline, made her physical beauty and gifts a necessity to his intense and vital nature; but also those months had warned him of the danger of surrendering his will and of allowing Simone to interfere with his work. With her beside him he was deprived of half his strength and all his independence of action. Simone was intensely feminine; she would brook no rival; and to her his research work, his desire to go with Crawford to Panama, was an idle fancy to be checked as swiftly as possible.

Yet, as Robert had said, she was his wife. She had a right to complain if he left her for months at a time less than a year after marriage; and since his work lay in so poisonous a district as the Isthmus, his duty was to persuade her to remain away. His duty also to her was to return himself and give up this precious dream that for three years had been deep within his heart. He argued with himself now, as he had argued often before, that he had told her fully of his plans before they were married, that she had chosen to marry him knowing quite well that he intended to carry on his work, and that that work might lead him

into places where it would be impossible for her to follow him—but the argument was specious and he knew it. She was his wife, she had a right to his society, and he was exposing her to difficulties and misapprehension.

Yet he had already learned the lesson of too completely surrendering his independence of thought or action; three months, let alone all this last time, had been sufficient to show him how utterly Simone could wreck ambition and usefulness.

To her the pleasures of the body were supreme, and, as such, everything was to give way to them; and because she was exquisite, because in all her sensuality there was no grain of coarseness, she wielded a power that must gradually enervate and destroy the ambition and the purpose of any man who loved her. In her arms was a forgetfulness of all the world, an ecstasy undreamed of beyond the walls that sheltered her, a magic that led to a life of joy, drugged, perhaps, yet joy that enticed and beckoned, that wrought a subtle magic and ended—where?

Kent shuddered with the violent shudder of a man attacked by nausea; jumping up he knocked out his pipe and began hurriedly undressing, driving from his mind the thoughts and visions that had occupied it. To-morrow there was work hard and dangerous, work ready to his hand and

crying out to be accomplished; yet when he was ready for bed he sat down by the light of the smoky little lamp and wrote a letter to her, explaining the situation, suggesting that she remain in New York another couple of months, during which time he would have a house prepared for her either at Colon, Panama itself, or where Crawford should consider the healthiest situation.

CHAPTER VII

"Hullo Kent! Heard the latest from Washington?"

Kent came to an abrupt standstill in the middle of the street—a street of unpaved roadway, of holes and puddles, of heavy-walled ancient houses and picturesque untidiness. He was just finishing an examination of his district sanitary inspector's work, and the man who stopped him, big-shouldered, brown-faced, extremely handsome in a rather flamboyant yet attractive way, was evidently bubbling over with indignation and needed an audience; his name was Cather, and he and Robert Kent had formed something of a friendship, both being animated by devotion to the work in hand on the Isthmus, and upholding Crawford's method in dealing with it.

"No," Lionel said in answer to his indignant question. "What's up? Something wrong?"

"You know the chief's request for mosquito netting sufficient to screen all official buildings? Well, the darned fools of the Commission have refused the request as extravagant and unneces-

sary. Unnecessary, and fever gettin' a hold in the whole zone in spite of all we do! What do they think, away there in Washington, and do they ever think at all?"

Kent laughed shortly.

"Do you think that's the latest? I can give you one better. The chief asked by cable for sufficient netting for the hospital windows and verandas, and the answer has come through to-day that it is quite unnecessary to screen more than part of the verandas, as the rest can be boarded up. There, you have the real opinion of men, set to determine how far the sanitary work is really important."

"My God, I'd like to see 'em lying sick," Cather said savagely. "How can we stop this damnable pestilence if everything that is asked for is refused on the score of extravagance? Don't they realize at home that it isn't only steam shovels, and dirt-trains and excavators that are building this canal?"

"They don't realize anything but what it's costing them," Kent said bitterly. "There are two more cases of fever here. I've just seen the Governor. He has been cabling in support of Colonel Crawford, but I doubt if he'll have any better success. One member of the Commission against the rest—what can you expect?"

"The only one who has the courage to live in the place where the rest should be as long as they dictate to us. It's damnable—damnable."

Kent looked at him steadily.

"Don't kill yourself over it," he said, more gently than he was wont to speak. "Sooner or later we'll get what we need. We've the finest chief in Crawford that any man could work for, and so far the fever hasn't got too bad a hold."

"There's bubonic at La Boca."

"I know. Even the most efficient quarantine is bound to fail sometimes, and bubonic is at all the Carribbean sea ports. We can keep that in hand I think. It's the drugs and appliances and general supplies that are so hard to get. Don't get too upset."

Cather stood for a moment looking at the muddy ground at his feet, then suddenly he raised his head and looked at Kent; he was the taller of the two and some eight years younger, a magnificent specimen of his race.

"Look here," he said, "I'll tell you why I'm rattled over this latest affair, but I don't want it to go any further. When I was home last February—I was sent for, as my mother was very ill, and got three weeks' leave—I married, and my wife wants to be with me here. I've had the fever —way back in Cuba, but she hasn't. Your wife

is out here and she seems to be fit. Do you think it's safe for me to have Mary here?"

Lionel was silent a moment, then he said:

"My dear fellow, I can't possibly say. Is she anxious to come?"

"Very."

"And not nervous, knowing the risks?"

"Not a bit."

"Then I should not worry. Why don't you bring her round to see us one day if she comes. My wife could show her the place."

"I'd like to," Cather said quickly. "All right. We'll chance it. I've got lodgings not far from Ancon hospital—just on the border between Ancon and Panama."

Kent nodded.

"You know where my house is, of course. I'll tell my wife to write to Mrs. Cather when she arrives."

He nodded and went on along the narrow street, his keen glance noting every possible source of trouble in the yards and darker corners of the streets, for, despite the sanitary work already done, much remained, since the natives were incredibly idle and slovenly. It had interested him in his few hours of spare time during these last months to learn what he could of the Republic of Panama, beyond the Canal Zone, and he had found it

singularly disappointing, the roads poor and few, the land rich, yet so overgrown and badly kept that half its wealth was not touched, the people a mongrel race of Cholo Indian, negro, and Spaniard with all the faults of the cross-breed, and persistently unfriendly, especially in the towns. The government was a disgrace, political antagonism and bitterness being carried to the furthest extremities of social as well as public life; bribery, "jobbing" and patronage being so much the rule that they were taken absolutely for granted. Grandiose public buildings had been erected, swallowing up money sadly needed for roads and harbours, buildings that were seldom used and ridiculously over-sized. Even the well-to-do families of good blood lived in a slovenly and uncomfortable manner and already showed dislike for the newly-arrived Americans; social life, from the usual point of view, appeared non-existent; there was no national sport and its place was miserably taken by cock-fighting, while hostility to the "Gringo" was apparent on all sides.

Kent, deeply interested in the future of the Canal Zone, realizing that the building of the Canal itself must mean a period of residence for those at work on it, extending over some eight or nine years at least, knowing, too, the immense, numbers of men that would of necessity be em-

ployed, wondered, as he had wondered a hundred times before, how the domestic and social life would work out.

Several of the higher officials of the administration had brought their families to Panama, or to Colon at the other end of the Isthmus, and so far all seemed to be well. Yet he knew, and knew, too, that very soon others would be aware of the fact, that yellow fever was again on the increase, and that knowledge was distressing in view of the sanitary measures already enforced.

It was early April and still an hour before sunset. Lionel had to see one of his district inspectors who lived in Panama City and, turning seawards, made his way along the crooked dirty streets. It was a day of steamy heat with an overcast sky, and as Lionel walked his thin coat clung to his shoulders and his forehead was damp with sweat. Crawford desired to clean up these open sewers in the back streets, to pull down the slums and drive wide boulevards through the city; such drastic work was necessary if Panama were not to remain a pest-hole; since, if it did, sanitation measures against yellow fever and malaria on the remainder of the Zone would be useless.

Yet, if the authorities at Washington raised objections, as they did, to such small requisitions as sufficient wire-netting for screening purposes

and proper supplies of drugs, what would their attitude be to the expenses incurred in pulling down and rebuilding a city's slums?

The old question of the man on the spot and the man at home . . . Lionel walked swiftly despite the heaviness of the air, pondering the vexed question, wondering what the future of this vast enterprise would be . . . and suddenly pulled up short, at the sight of a slovenly woman emptying into the unpaved street just outside her doorway a bucket of slops and following it by a heap of refuse flung carelessly to fall where it would.

"Don't you know that is against the rules, señora?" he said, speaking as pleasantly as he could, since irritability was of no avail. "If you keep on throwing rubbish out here instead of burning it, your children and the families of your friends will not grow up strong."

The woman, bucket in hand, answered him sullenly.

"This is my house. The señor does not know that it is the custom for many years."

"It is a bad custom," Lionel said, with the patience of one speaking to a child. "If you wish to keep your family well and the children of strangers free from fever, you must burn your rubbish."

"My family are always well. The señor is a

gringo. He does not understand the ways of Panama."

Kent wrote down something in his little notebook, for this narrow alley must be speedily attended to, and went on his way; if those men at Washington could see these slums of the city, would they believe Crawford's methods were necessary, or would they still consider them extravagant and superfluous?

He walked on to that part of the city where his district inspector, a man named Hasler, lived in a street near the old Spanish sea-wall.

Hasler, a short stout man in a white laboratory overall, welcomed him into the house, and there, rather to his surprise, he found two others waiting —Kleinwort, a German-American from Chicago, and Walrens, a big Dutchman, who hailed from somewhere in North Dakota.

Hasler explained their presence briefly.

"The chief has asked us to be at the hospital at half after six," he said. "There's something he wants done. I knew you were coming, so we waited. You've been over the other side of the Isthmus for two days?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Reeves is down. And Collis."

"Reeves? Collis?" Kent's voice was sharp. "Yellow fever?"

"Yes. Reeves is very bad."

Reeves was one of the high officials and a brilliant man, and Collis was an engineer immediately under Mr. Wallace. The news was grave, insomuch that it must speedily become public property and, in view of Crawford's vigorous work of fumigation, looked ominous.

For a moment, during which all three men looked at him, Kent was silent, then he said rather sharply:

"There'll be trouble if either of them die. There are several cases at Colon and one at Culebra in the camp there, that's threatening. I'm going over first thing in the morning. We'd better be getting up to the hospital."

They all three went out and made their way up the lower slope of Ancon Hill, where the French had built their chief hospital; a fine building, set in gardens where a profusion of flowering shrubs and plants made beautiful surroundings.

The northern suburb of the city, known as Ancon, nestled along the southern and eastern front of the mountain which rose abruptly and with some ruggedness from sea-level; but the French had graded the mountainside and made fine roads that ran through plantations of every variety of tropical shrub and tree. The buildings, over thirty in number, were scattered about this lovely

slope, and the San Carlos building, where most of the Frenchmen had been carried to die, was now the residence of Colonel Crawford and Dr. Grant, his chief medical officer.

As the three men walked up the slope of the hill not one of them spoke, their thoughts all too seriously dwelling upon the increasing trouble that had developed; Kent, in particular, realizing the danger of a panic spreading when the news should be known, remembering with hideous clarity those at Siboney.

Yet, even so, he could not but see the beauty around him, the row of stately tropical palms bordering the road between its retaining wall and the macadam surface, the forest that rose darkly green behind the white buildings to the mountain's summit, and eastward, the bay of Panama with its sprinkling of wooded islands set in a sea of turquoise.

Far away, beyond the bay, the Andes lifted their high ranges and on them the evening light lay in a golden splendour, tinging the loftier crests where the mist shadowed the snow to a deep, pure rose; small wonder the French with their love of beauty seized on this spot for the site for their great hospital.

The three men were shown immediately into Colonel Crawford's office, and he got up from his writing-chair to welcome them, a slight, lithe man,

whose thick hair and short moustache were now almost white. There were three other medical officers as well as Doctor Grant present, and the Colonel lost no time in disclosing his reason for the meeting.

"Gentlemen, I have an announcement to make to you that may be a surprise and certainly a matter of regret," he said. "The Governor is leaving the Isthmus, and a new Governor, Colonel Magoon, is arriving immediately. This is the first thing I have to tell you. The other is that the increase of yellow fever is alarming and we must be prepared to take even more stringent measures to combat it. Captain Kent, what is your report from Colon?"

"Three serious cases, one threatening at Culebra Cut. The three Colon cases are in hospital, and are not expected to recover."

"Yes. We have twenty-eight cases here and more expected. What is it?"

A servant had come into the room and handed a folded slip to Crawford; he read it, then said to the man:

"Say I will be along in fifteen minutes," and turned back to the other men, his face very grave.

"I regret deeply to tell you that Mr. Reeves died ten minutes ago," he said.

There was a little stir in the room; everyone

knew Collis was dying, but Reeves had had a comparatively light attack; it was Doctor Grant who spoke first.

"You intend to clear the hospital grounds, Colonel?"

"Yes. The pottery ring round each plant which, as you know, is there to protect the plant from the umbrella ants, is an ideal breeding ground for the stegomyia, and, as there are several thousands of these rings in the grounds, I propose clearing every bush and plant from the place for two hundred yards around the building. Vandalism, isn't it? But necessary, I fear, if we are to clear this hospital of fever."

"What about the water mains, Colonel?" Kent asked. "Have you heard anything more?"

"Nothing yet. Till we get pure water piped into Panama and Ancon it will be hard work to keep everything safe. As for the shrubbery, since wind and sunlight destroy mosquitoes, and shade and dampness harbour them, the French could hardly have placed Ancon hospital in a position more dangerous. Captain Kent," he turned to Lionel, speaking to him directly, "I want to transfer you to Culebra to install a district hospital there. Since I have had this message about Mr. Reeves, I cannot talk over details as I wished, unless you can walk down with me to

his house. He was taken ill there, as you know, and his wife begged for him not to be moved."

Five minutes later the two men were walking down the road to the town and Crawford began to speak of his new plans.

"It is certain now that the fumigation is not sufficient to prevent the yellow fever. We must utterly destroy every place where the stegomyia can breed. My plans, and those of Dr. Grant, you already know something about, but I wish to emphasize the chief details in your new district. You will establish a district hospital at Culebra, with rest-camps or sub-district hospitals where strictly necessary, for the care of men who are only a day or two sick. You will maintain, again, one or two dispensaries where medical service and medicines can be had free by the whole population.

"Free, sir?"

Crawford nodded.

"Yes. Don't you see what an accurate bureau of information it will be to the physician if the people can receive free treatment? Many of them would not come to either dispensary or hospital—you know the dread of hospitals the coloured people have—or if they came, would not come so early if they had to pay, whereas, with free treatment, they will come at the very commencement of sickness. That is the time

to treat them. Then, as our railway progresses, we can run special hospital cars to convey the serious cases to Ancon and Colon.

"You'll have to appoint inspectors for your district and trained men to work under them. There'll be drainage, clearance of bush, water-courses, holes in screening——" he paused suddenly and looked at his companion whimsically. "I hardly know why I repeat all this to you, Captain Kent. You know my methods, as few others."

Kent met the gaze and answered the smile that was irresistible.

"I am only too willing to hear you repeat anything, Colonel," he said, and Crawford nodded and walked on a little way in silence. It had puzzled him many a time, student of human nature as he was, why a man of Lionel Kent's calibre should have had that sudden unaccountable breakdown at Siboney, when he could later deliberately and of his own choice face the same danger that had so completely unmanned him then. For Kent was not the type of man whose nerves customarily get the better of him, and he had never before or since shown the slightest sign of anything approaching nervous strain. Indeed, Crawford considered him as one of the coolest men on the staff of the Canal's workers, and it

came to his mind now, as they walked together down the hill to the old city beneath them, that the explanation lay deeper than he had suspected. There was something behind that scene in his own office at Siboney, something unguessed at; and because he was a man who had an almost passionate sense of generosity and justice, he realized that he must some day discover what that something was, and if his belief be correct or no.

"You have a brother on the Canal, I hear?" he said as they approached the city, leaving his own subject for a few moments. "An engineer."

"Yes, sir. He has been stationed at Colon, but was yesterday moved to Culebra, for the time being."

"Ah, then you haven't so far seen much of him. When we get the railroad in proper condition matters will be very much changed. You will find it difficult to remove your sick from Culebra just yet"—he was back to the matter that filled all their thoughts at present—"but, for the time being, it cannot be helped. You understand how important it is to have all vegetation cut away for two hundred yards around every house to ensure the wind and sun getting to the ground, and to screen every vessel containing water and to dry every little stagnant pool?"

Lionel nodded.

"Yes, sir."

Crawford looked at him and a smile came into his eyes.

"I have not forgotten, Captain Kent," he said.

Lionel made no reply, for there had come into his mind the belief which he had expressed, unbelieving, to Robert, that Crawford had forgotten the Siboney incident. When hundreds of men were losing their nerve in a panic, one more coward made little impression, and in such a list of names and applications for the home drafts his own might easily be unnoticed. He felt a sudden throb of elation, coveting, as he did, this man's good opinion, for Crawford he knew was referring now to Las Animas and the tests there; then Crawford changed the subject abruptly and spoke of quite other matters.

Meanwhile at the Tivoli Hotel, a fine building quite near Ancon Hill, Simone sat idly turning the pages of a French journal just arrived and wondered whether her coming to the Canal had been a mistake. Lionel had been enraptured to see her, she had been given the warmest of welcomes by the high officials of the Canal, the British Minister and his wife had proved to be relatives of friends of her own in Paris; there had been a certain novelty in being regarded as an exceptionally brave woman, whereas, the truth was that

she had no imagination, and was quite indifferent to physical danger. Still, it remained to be seen whether her coming had weakened or strengthened her hold over her husband, and she dreaded the possibility of becoming bored.

Footsteps across the bare polished boards made her look up to see one of the negro servants announcing a visitor, and a second later Robert came in in his grimy working clothes, coat-less, his thin khaki shirt sticking to his chest and shoulders, his hair rough and his face damp with sweat. He came half-way across the room and stood still.

"'Evening, Simone. For heaven's sake, excuse my turning up like this, but Lionel met me and sent me to give you a message. He's had to go back to the Saint Charles Buildings to see Crawford again and asked me to say don't wait supper for him."

Simone's blue glance travelled over his tall, muscular figure.

"That's the third time this week. Don't stand there in that ridiculous way, Robert. Sit down."

"I can't. I'm filthy. Came straight from work."

"Never mind."

He shook his head.

"My dear Simone, I'd ruin the chair. Grease and mud."

"Then go and have a bath and change, and come back and dine with me."

He hesitated for the fraction of a second, then accepted.

"Thanks, very much. I'd love to. Can you give me an hour?"

"Two, if you like," Simone's glance was veiled, yet she was consciously studying him, "I shall be ready for you," and as he went out of the room she smiled a little, then sent for her maid, told her to inform the hotel that she had a guest, and went to take her bath and get ready for dinner.

When Robert returned at a quarter-past eight, he found the table in a secluded corner of the hotel dining-room, its flowers and silver illumined by the soft light of four candles, and Simone looking exquisite—an amazing contrast to the day he had spent amidst mud and greasy machinery in the stifling humidity of Culebra Cut and in the company of men whose nerves were keyed to a dangerous tension.

Robert, the marriage once accomplished, had tried, with a certain measure of success, to forget that scene at Hertebury House and Simone's share in its cause. She was his brother's wife; the Duke and his own passion were at one and the same time thrust into the outer darkness and it was the barest honour to keep them there; yet,

knowing what he did, he kept out of her way and this was the first occasion for over two years that he had found himself alone with her. She must love his brother very deeply to face this place with him, to run the risk of the tropical diseases against which Colonel Crawford and his staff were putting up such a gallant fight . . . if she loved Lionel, he, Robert, could forget the past and Hertebury, could stamp out his own desires . . . yet how lovely she was, how seductive, sitting there talking to him, with her heavy-lidded blue-grey eyes and her smooth shining head. She was Europe and its sophistication and its lure against the crude civilization of the New World and the decadent residue of a great race here in Panama. He was so absorbed in his own thoughts, as he watched her, that he had very little consciousness of her actual words, till she leaned forward and tapped his hand where it lay on the cloth.

"Robert! Have you heard one word of what I said to you?"

Brought back to the present realities with a jerk, the dull red crept under his tan.

"I was watching you," he said. "No. Am I to be blamed?"

She leaned back again, watching him unsmiling.

"You are remiss," she said. "Why do you not amuse me? I spend so many hours alone——"

"I am sorry," he, too, did not smile, aware of the rising heat in his blood. "I am afraid we men are none of us very amusing these days. You must be bored to death."

"No. Not bored," she said, "interested—curious. Do you believe you will conquer this land? Build your canal?" Lulled by her sudden and unexpected change from the personal to the subject so dear to him, he lost his sense of caution and answered with swift eagerness:

"Of course we shall conquer it! Why, Simone, we're beginning now. In a few months we shall have thousands more men here, more machinery, more money. It is only a question of sanitation —mosquitoes——"

"Oh—mosquitoes!" she shrugged away the word. "Don't talk to me of them! Lionel's life is bounded by matters dealing with insects and house fumigation, varied by occasional outbursts against Washington and the Commission. He has ceased to be human."

The warning sounded in Robert's brain, but he disregarded it.

"You see, until we can get the better of the fever, we dare not move too many men down here," he said, resting his arms on the table and leaning a little towards her. "There are more cases than we like now."

"There are always tropical diseases in the tropics," she said carelessly. "I cannot quite see why all this fuss and delay is necessary. However, let us talk about something more interesting. Tell me just what you are doing."

"I am superintending the working of a steam shovel that handles tons of earth, and keeps five hundred men excavating. The shovel is one of the old French ones and pretty rusty. To-day, I spent an hour with its innards, hence the grease, and I shall probably repeat the job to-morrow. But, as a matter of fact, my work is railroad reconstruction. The Panama railroad is single track; it has practically no sidings or station buildings; there's a worn-out telegraph line, and the rolling stock has been obsolete for years. Colon is piled with freight—thousands of tons of it piled in warehouses and at the docks—stuff has been there for months—over a year—in some cases, because the line can't handle it. Even the shipping papers and bills of lading have been lost. Now we've got to get that in order so as to handle food and supplies of all kinds for the Canal employees, and for transportation of actual plant, for there's no road across the Isthmus. If only those darned slow-coaches up north would settle at which level they are going to build the Canal, we'd have a simple job——"

He broke off, suddenly aware that Simone was watching him with an enigmatic little smile.

"What is it?" he said quickly. "I am boring you. We all talk shop nowadays. I'm sorry."

"No, no! I'm not bored. Only—amused."

"Amused? Why?"

"You are so enthusiastic—so young."

"Is enthusiasm so contemptible a thing?"

"Not at all. How old are you, Robert?"

"Twenty-nine. Why"?

"I wondered. And you are content with the prospect of spending the next six or seven years in this remote corner of the earth? Is it your choice of life?"

Something in her tone made him keep silence a moment; he lit a cigarette with extreme deliberation before he answered, and then he did not look at her.

"It is as good a way as any other," he said, rather too carelessly. "Why not?"

"Is that an answer?" she asked, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps not. It's rather an impossible question. Are you content to be here, yourself?"

"Yes. For the moment," her gaze travelled reflectively over his powerful shoulders and fine head, coming to rest on the dusky garden lit by a clouded moon beyond the windows.

"This is an experiment," she said, "and experiments always interest me. When I am tired, or if I fail, I shall persuade Lionel to take me to Europe for a visit."

Her mention of her husband's name was deliberate; she had no intention of allowing Robert to tread too quickly upon dangerous ground, and with a deft twist to the conversation she talked of England, of a letter she had had from Enid, of Gaston's possible move to Rome.

"If he is transferred, do you suppose your little cousin Dolores will go with them, or will she remain with the Townleys? Such an attractive child."

"With the Townleys, I imagine. She will be eighteen next spring and that means coming-out. Dolores is a darling. Enid will miss her horribly if she has to give her up."

The danger-point was passed, Robert's faint uneasiness lulled, and they sauntered into the big lounge for coffee, and talked easily and idly of impersonal things, till Simone asked him to take her to the sea-wall.

"I hear the old sea-wall of Panama is the most wonderful place on the night of a full moon such as this even if it is a little cloudy. Take me down, Robert. It is not too far."

"The sea-wall?" he hesitated a moment. "Better not."

"Mosquitoes? My dear boy, don't be absurd! Can I spend all my days cloistered, because a mosquito may bite me? Besides—that is Colonel Crawford's theory. It is not necessarily the correct one."

"There's a hundred per cent. chance that it is," Robert said rather grimly. "I'd like nothing better than to take you, but, if you please, we'll wait till Lionel comes in. I don't know as much about the little brutes as he does."

"Will we? If you refuse your escort, my dear Robert, I shall go alone. It is a heavenly night and I am tired of sitting still."

"You can't!" he said fiercely. "No woman of your class can go wandering round Panama at night alone."

"No? Then you see that you must come. Be sensible—I have been here a fortnight, and I have not yet seen one of the sights of the place. Tell the waiter to fetch Madeleine. I want a scarf."

"You must not go," he repeated. "It may be dangerous, Simone. I don't know. At least wait till Lionel can go with you."

"I wish you to come with me," she said. "Lionel may be hours late and I will not stop indoors all this heavenly night. Are you going to do as I ask, Robert, or must I go alone? Because I am going. That is quite certain."

They had both risen, and now at her last words Robert spoke more curtly than was quite tactful.

"You shall not, Simone."

"Shall not?" her tone was suddenly arrogant. "How will you prevent me? By force? Or perhaps it is because you yourself are afraid of the yellow fever?"

She could not but be surprised at the effect of her words, for Robert's tanned face turned a curious, sickly white; he stood for a moment with gritting jaw and rigid limbs.

"No," he said after that pause, "no. I am not afraid of yellow fever—now. But I am afraid of the possible danger for you. Simone, please be generous. Do not force me to an impossible position."

She, in her turn, was silent for a moment, then with a little careless gesture she waved him away.

"Very well. I shall not ask you again, and if I am not to have some exercise I shall go to bed. I am tired of lounging about all day. Good night, my dear Robert."

She was dismissing him with as little ceremony as if he had been an erring courtier and she a monarch. He was angry and bitterly hurt, but he knew her and made no further mistake in dealing with her.

"Good night, Simone," he said. "I am sorry

I have been such a failure," and without attempting any further farewell he turned round and walked away.

Left alone, Simone stood quite still for nearly a moment staring at the door. It did not seem credible to her that she had failed in bending him to her will, for she knew well enough what his feelings for her had been, despite her long liaison with his cousin Hertebury, at which he, like the rest of the world, guessed only too accurately; and his change of attitude now, on this first tête-à-tête since her marriage, at first surprised and then infuriated her. Going over to the window she stood looking out over the moonlit gardens and the distant glimmer of the ocean, her teeth set in her lower lip, her eyes contracted till the pupil was hardly more than a pin's point of black in the blue iris. The fool, to think he could so easily get away! To imagine for one moment that she would be dictated to, told to behave only as her husband would wish, treated as a domestic creature bound to her lord's will . . . did he dream that she would permit anything to interfere with her own wishes? Furious, yet outwardly controlled, she turned round and came face to face with Lionel.

"*Mon dieu*, how you startled me!" she exclaimed. "When did you come in? You've changed."

"Yes, and had a carbolic bath. I know I smell revolting, but I've been up at Ancon. You are well, dearest?"

"Naturally. Have you dined?"

"Not yet. Don't trouble to come in with me. There's a mail in—read your letters while I get some food, then I'll come and join you."

He laid a packet of letters beside her on the little coffee-table, and she sank down in a chair and began looking over the envelopes—while Lionel, secretly disappointed at her not accompanying him and aware of his unreasonableness in so being, went away to the deserted hotel dining-room.

When he came back for his coffee, twenty minutes later, he felt refreshed and less anxious; and Simone had evidently been pleased with her correspondence, since she was smiling a little as she patted the chair beside her.

"I have a letter here from your sister," she said. "Gaston is being transfered to Rome and they are giving up their London house. She tells me that a long letter to you will arrive by the next mail, but that for the moment she is desperately busy getting everything arranged for the change."

"Rome? By Jove, how mad she will be at leaving London . . . And Dolores? What will they do with her? Take her with them?"

"I should hardly think so. She will surely go back to Lady Flora Townley."

"Poor child. She loved being with Enid. We ought to have her out here when the place gets a little more cleaned up. She'd be company for you."

Simone was silent a moment.

"I do not need a companion," she said, after that brief pause. "And Dolores is only a child."

"A most lovable one. And she is my cousin —I should like to look after her a little. Hertebury is not very much of a brother to her."

"No, I suppose not; but you could hardly expect a man of his type to be troubled with a child."

"That's so. And at present it is not desirable for anyone non-immune to fever to come out here. I ought not to let you stay either, Simone. Do you realize that?"

"Can you prevent me?" she asked, looking at him from beneath heavy white lids, and he drew his chair nearer and laid his hand for a moment over hers.

"No. You're wonderful to face this danger to be with me, Simone. Do you know how wonderful?"

His voice, a little hoarse, and the points of

fire flickering in his eyes, stirred her as no other man's passion had ever done. She felt the desire that leaped like an electric current from his body to hers at the contact, and shivered.

"Do you want me to stay?"

"Want you? I starved for you—I am not alive without you—I ought to send you home, out of this place, away from risk, but I can't. I can't . . . Simone . . ."

It was always the same, the quick firing of the blood, passion re-uniting, the woman resentful in her heart at the strength of her desire which left her defenceless; the man, knowing full well that she was a weakness in the armour of his strength rather than a bulwark of protection; yet helpless before his need of her.

CHAPTER VIII

The next day, however, other matters swept in upon even Simone's egotism; her maid, frightened and hysterical, demanded to leave for France and, when Simone questioned her sharply, cried out that she would not stay to die in Panama.

"To die? Don't be absurd, Madeleine," Simone said icily. "Why should you die in Panama any more than in Paris."

"It is the fever, madame—the yellow fever. Señor Esteban, who owns the casino near the fountain—his cook is dead—the Señor himself—a man with whom I have talked often—he is ill also. There are people in the streets saying that they will not stay . . . Americans, madame . . . I saw them . . ."

Lionel, idling for the last five minutes over his coffee before his long day of work, looked up sharply from a week-old paper.

"What's that, Madeleine? Americans?"

Madeleine, satisfied that she had produced a sensation whirled round.

"It is true, m'sieur! But only too true! I

heard it last night and this morning. Here, in the hotel they talk, and say that now perhaps the foreigners will leave them in peace."

Lionel threw aside the paper and got to his feet.

"I must get off and see what truth there is in this. Stop upsetting madame, Madeleine. You are as safe as she is."

"But I will not stay—I cannot! My mother in France—my so-old father—I will not die here, thousands of miles from my France——"

He cut her short, turning to Simone.

"Let her go, Simone. I'll get you a good Spanish maid. We can't keep anyone here against their will."

Simone shot him a look so bitterly hostile that for the instant he stood staring at her, then in a voice of ice she answered him.

"Madeleine understood the risk when she expressed her willingness to come. I cannot permit her to change her mind just because she is tired of Panama. She will keep her contract with me as I will with her. Please do not interfere."

At the tone as much as the words, the unfortunate girl lost the last remnant of her self-control. Flinging herself on her knees she caught at Simone, weeping, praying, imploring, wild with fear, and Simone, her face hard as marble, stood motionless.

"Don't make such a fool of yourself," she said contemptuously. "You cannot go unless I pay for your passage, and that I will not do. Get up and go on with your work."

The outburst that followed, and the complete pitilessness of Simone's attitude filled Lionel with a sick disgust. Going to the frantic girl he loosened her grip of his wife, lifted her to her feet and put her in a chair.

"Madame will send you home by the next boat," he said, shortly. "Now pull yourself together and do your work till then like a sensible girl. You should be ashamed to be so cowardly when madame is so brave."

"Madame has reason to be here—she can leave when she wishes—she has not seen what I have seen—or heard——"

Madeleine's sobbing gasps were subsiding, but Simone's beautiful face was livid with rage.

"How dare you tell her that, when I have said she shall stay? Are you mad to contradict my orders?" her voice was controlled, but her eyes were blazing and she took a step forward, standing between him and the door. "Be good enough to order your own servants and leave mine alone."

The venom in her tone and look struck him like a physical blow; he stood quite still for a moment, a curious ashen hue under his tan, then

his jaw hardened, the old mask of icy indifference dropped once more before his face and he spoke in a tone she had never heard before.

"In future I will remember your wishes, but this time you will do as I say. There is a boat sailing for New York on Thursday. Madeleine will leave on it. Do you understand?"

For a full moment they stood there looking at one another, and in that moment Lionel knew what he had done; then Simone spoke:

"Very well," she said in a low voice. "She shall go. Now will you please leave me?"

He went without a word, and quitting the hotel, found himself half-way up the long slope of Ancon hill before his thoughts cleared and he dared let himself think deliberately of the scene just past. That he had been precipitate and tactless he realized now, but Simone's indifference to the wretched girl's terror had jarred him, and the whole scene had brought back with a sickening vividness the memory of Siboney; had there been any sympathy or even comprehension in his wife's face or words he would have checked his order to her; but her hardness, her utter and complete disregard of all but her own convenience, had stripped her in his eyes of everything but her power of seduction. That she still possessed, but the deliberate cruelty she had shown, even more

than the glimpse of her soul that she had shown him in that moment when their wills met and clashed, had destroyed once and for all his wild passion. That she would still have power over his body he knew, since that most primitive and most powerful of forces was in both of them a fierce flame, but more than that—never; and always he would despise himself for his weakness.

So that was marriage for him—two human beings, bound by law, tormented and driven by fierce desire for one another, and behind it, hatred looking out when desire was satiated. Had he been a younger man the incident might not so violently have stripped from him his illusions as to his wife; but as it was, he was experienced enough to know that a marriage such as his had been doomed from the first. Simone had enchanted him with her beauty, driven him mad by her physical attraction, and only in the earliest stages of their acquaintance had she even pretended to give him any companionship.

He had been blinded by his desire for her and remained blinded wilfully; he had known and not cared that Gaston, who might be supposed to understand Simone well, had disapproved of the marriage and been deeply uneasy as to its result. He had wanted her and made up his mind to have her; she had responded, and the fire that burned

in both had destroyed all else in its flame. He despised himself now, as he had never despised any human being, and when he arrived at Ancon Hospital, Schofield, one of the doctors who was the first person to speak to him, uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Great heavens! you look bad—what's up? Here——"

He seized his wrist, but Lionel pulled it away.

"I'm perfectly well," he said and lied swiftly. "But I had some bad news. Nothing much, but enough to be disturbing for the moment. How's Reeves? Have you heard?"

"Died at two this morning," Schofield said shortly. "Collis at midnight. There are two more cases in Panama itself, and I'm not at all satisfied about a man admitted about five to-day —a negro. Drunk and with a high temperature. Can't get any details yet, so we're watching him. Are you off now?"

"Yes. I want to take certain supplies with me."

"Hope we've got 'em. The chief is nearly wild because our drugs are running low, and the new supplies he wrote for haven't come in on the last boat."

Lionel nodded curtly, and went on to come out of the main building a few minutes later with a brow like a thundercloud; his district hospital.

small and desperately needing both drugs and general outfit, was once more to be run apparently on air, since no further quantities of essential drugs had been received, and not one foot of wire netting could be spared from the already denuded Ancon buildings.

A dilapidated contractor's train ran morning and evening from Atlantic to Pacific as the means for moving men; and at Panama he boarded it, wondering if he should see Robert. The news of the deaths of Reeves and Collis had shocked him and given him warning of what might be expected if the threatened epidemic became a fact, and, for the time being, had driven his own unhappy personal affairs from his mind. On the train were about a hundred Canal employees to be dropped at various places along the canal, and it seemed to him that there was less talking and joking in the trucks and cars than usual, as if the shadow of danger and fear hung above them.

He dismissed the thought impatiently as the train jerked itself to a halt at Culebra, and swung himself off before the crowd came tumbling from the trucks, made his way through the mud and broken earth along a rough track to the hospital, a rough enough place, but better than nothing, in that it did afford some kind of shelter and nursing for any man who should be injured during his work.

There were several fairly mild cases of malaria, one or two suspicious cases of "black vomit," a broken leg, a man suffering from concussion and a few minor injuries, but on the whole, affairs were not too serious; therefore Lionel was all the more surprised when one of his orderlies came to say he was wanted urgently, and following the man he found at the hospital entrance a little group of men. They shuffled and hesitated at his question: "Well? What is it?" and then one of their number was pushed forward as spokesman, a big, ugly-looking fellow, heavy-featured and brutish.

"We're through, boss," he announced. "We're gettin' off. See? Had enough of this . . . hole——" his language made Lionel's upper lip draw back in an ugly way. "Had enough of bein' treated like god-damned slaves, just waiting for the black vomit to finish us. We're through and we want our dollars."

"Oh. So that's what you want, do you?" Lionel said, with an edge in his voice not too pleasant to hear. "Let me tell you you have come to the wrong man. You will hand in your notices to your own overseers and you will be free to quit at the end of the week, like any other job. And not before. Do you understand that?"

There was a little surging movement in the

group and the spokesman took a step forward, his fists balling.

"We're quittin' now," he said. "I told you that a minute ago. No waitin' till the end of the week. We'll be dead by then. You've got money here and we're going to have it. The men are with me. Don't you worry."

A lightning glance had assured Lionel even before the threat, that the situation was a ticklish one, for work at the Cut was at a standstill and he could see men standing about in idle groups as if waiting to see the result of their foreman's interview. Where in the world could Robert be to let such a thing happen—with swift-working brain he drew back to the edge of the veranda.

"Very well, if you want to quit you can," he said. "It's true I have some money and I will pay you what I have. Stride—that's your name, isn't it? Keep where you are and I will get it from my office."

He did not for an instant expect the ruse to work, but they let him step inside the doorway, and almost at once he was back and at the edge of the veranda, one hand significantly poised.

"I will shoot the first man who moves," he said, and though his tone was quiet it carried beyond the little circle of startled men below him. "I have listened to you and you will listen to me.

To-night, any man who wishes may hand in his notice, receive his pay at the end of the week and leave by Sunday's boat—if it arrives. Those of you who still have some claim left to be called men will stay and see this thing through. That there is danger we all know, but we who have been in Havana with Colonel Crawford are willing to be with him here on the Isthmus. But no man shall quit now in the middle of the day's work and disgrace his country in the eyes of the whole world. That is all I have to say. Get back all of you, and get back quick!"

They needed no second bidding. The glint of the gun, the hard jaw and cold brilliant eyes of the man who held it, were powerful arguments; awkwardly, half-ashamed, they turned their backs and made their way down the path to the Cut, and Lionel followed them grimly, saw them disperse, saw their waiting companions going on once again with the jobs in hand, and slipping the revolver in his jacket pocket, retraced his own steps to the hospital.

An hour later he went out to inspect the camp and found much that called forth his wrath, for with the renewal of the fever the panic he dreaded showed its first bad signs; there were receptacles for water left uncovered, ditches undrained, disinfectant unused, and a general looseness of sani-

tary discipline everywhere noticeable. He spoke sharply, and personally supervised all that lay in his power; then calling up some men who were carting earth, took them off that work and set them to clearing away the brushwood and undergrowth all around the hospital and camp site to a distance of a hundred yards, and was going back to the hospital just preparatory to leaving on the evening train, when he saw Robert emerge from a hut where he had been checking tools and run for the already starting train. He caught it with a leap, but not till they stopped at the next halt did he have a chance to run along the track and join his brother. Lionel greeted him none too cordially.

"Where the devil were you when your men tried to raise hell this morning?" he demanded. "Nice crowd."

"I was up the line hauling some French-rolling stock out of the jungle. I heard about it. Pity you couldn't have shot 'em up. That bunch is rotten."

"Evidently. I'm taking charge there next week, but I can't ask Simone to come with me. You'll have to look after her for me. I shall only get what leave I must."

"Rather hard on Simone, isn't it?"

"Very hard. Perhaps a little later she might be able to find a place nearer me; but it's very certain she can't come out to the Cut now."

"That's so. You start next week?"

"Yes. I take over the entire place. Hullo! What's up with that fella——?"

He was at the other end of the car, but it did not take him a couple of minutes to reach the next and see, leaning against its side, left alone by the frightened, grimy men who had drawn back, a man of middle age, his face flushed yet grey, the perspiration running down it. He had just recovered from a violent attack of vomiting, and one look convinced Lionel what was the matter. Stripping off his jacket he rolled it into a rough pillow, helped the exhausted, trembling man to lie down, and knelt beside him to make a hasty examination. He was flushed and in acute abdominal pain, but, as is the case in yellow fever, was entirely conscious and able to answer questions. Yes, he had been feeling ill since the previous night; thought it was nothing worth reporting, but during the morning's working he had a slight hæmorrage from the throat and just before getting on the train an attack of vomiting . . . he looked up into Lionel's grave face with fever-bright eyes and laid hold of his sleeve.

"If I snuff out, there's my wife in New Orleans. Her address is in my pocket—oh!" He broke off to groan and once again was violently sick, and Lionel beckoned a man to him.

"Get a stretcher directly we reach Panama," he directed, and seeing the shaken, terrified men penned up with the sick man and himself in the truck, he laughed.

"You won't catch it from this poor devil!" he said contemptuously. "I am proud of my countrymen to-day," and with that, he turned back to the poor wretch at his feet. At Panama the men tumbled out, falling over one another in their desire to put space as far as possible between themselves and the dying man on the floor. One of them, however, had the grace to remember to send back two hospital orderlies with a stretcher, and the unfortunate man was carried off to hospital.

To Lionel, walking back afterwards, a roundabout way to the Tivoli hotel, it was fatally easy to see the signs of panic in the streets of Ancon, where the American employees lodged and lived. Screens had been pulled down, left broken or open, water permitted to stand in tubs or lie in neglected pools near the houses, rubbish had been untidily flung beside the cans instead of inside, and when he stopped outside one house to reprimand its tenant, his sharp words were met with sullen grumbles.

"What's the good? You come round and tell us all this stuff, but we get the yellow jack anyway. All this about 'skeeters and flies—lot of hot air

served out to keep us quiet and working till we drop."

"Don't talk damned nonsense," Lionel said curtly. "You're a free man. Quit at the end of the week, if you want to be a quitter; but keep the rules as long as you are here, or I'll report you."

"Aw, shucks! Quit yourself! What do any of you know about it, anyway?"

"More than you, thanks to the courage of two of your countrymen in Cuba. Keep your screens closed and in repair, cover every receptacle that holds water and clear all those weeds away round the place, and you'll be as healthy here as in New York."

The man muttered something, and, with a last command, Kent turned away and went on his way to meet one of the higher officials of the Canal, a burly, noisy man by the name of Lockhart, who asked him a few questions and clapped him boisterously upon the back.

"All this scare about a few cases of fever! Bless my heart there's always fever of some sort about! Can't understand it—no more danger than anywhere else—might be run over crossing a street in Chicago. Can only die once!"

Lionel, who disliked being clapped on the back, drew back as imperceptibly as he could.

"Very sensible way to look at it," he said. "Are you dining at John Haig's to-night?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I may look in for a cocktail. Excuse me now. I am dirty after working all day and must get a bath."

Lockhart made him an effusive farewell, and Lionel left him with a muttered comment more eloquent than polite and went on to the hotel.

Simone was not in their room, neither was she in her bedroom, and, relieved, he took his bath, changed into the white linen of the evening and went down to the terrace of the gardens. He had warned her about sitting there at sundown and hardly expected to find her, but she was there, walking slowly up and down with Jim Cather, who flushed when he saw Kent and waved a salute.

Lionel walked across the gravel to them, greeted Cather and spoke to Simone in his usual tone.

"You had better not stay out any longer," he said. "It's safer behind screens. Had anything amusing happen?"

Simone's lips smiled, but her eyes were hostile as they met his.

"My dear man, what an optimist you are! What could happen here that would be amusing? Quaint thought, Captain Cather, isn't it?"

"Oh, you never know!" Cather said cheerfully. "Funny things do happen even here. Kent, heard the latest? They want to kick out the chief and replace him by somebody who doesn't believe in the mosquito idea. That's a funny thing if you like."

"You're not serious?" Kent said, stopping short, and Cather nodded.

"On my honour. The Commission are considering his successor. Kent——" the laughter died from his face and voice, "it's damnable—I'm sorry Mrs. Kent—and it mustn't happen. If he goes—the Canal goes too."

Kent nodded.

"You're right there. That's a wicked business . . . you'll dine with us, Jim?"

Simone echoed the invitation as Cather paused, and a few minutes later they were sitting at their window table and Simone, since there was an audience, gave her attention to conversation on the Canal and surprised Lionel by her intelligent comments. Later, when coffee was on the table, Robert strolled in—and, later still, a message came by one of the hotel servants to Simone. She received it in silence, sat abstracted for a minute or two, then smiling a little made her apologies and left them, returning in about fifteen minutes; but when an hour or two later Lionel went up to

bed he found her door locked and the lights out. That was not unusual since they had always occupied separate rooms, for it had been one of her expressed wishes, since in France such isolation had been the custom; but coming after the brief unhappy scene between them earlier in the day, such an act as the locking of her door was significant.

Lionel stood for a minute, guessing she was awake, then shrugged and went to his own room, to be roused in the morning by a vigorous knocking on his door. Cursing eloquently at the visitor's impatience, he rose and slipped back the bolt to see the hotel manager before him in a state approaching hysteria.

Lionel's curt questions pulled him together, and it appeared that Madame's French maid was very ill—had been ill since last night; that Madame had sent for the doctor who to-day—yes—at seven o'clock—pronounced the dread sentence. What was to be done? He, Juan da Fuca—glorious name—was not afraid, the Panamanians were immune; but, if it were known that there was a case of yellow fever in the hotel, every foreigner would leave and he, Juan da Fuca, would be ruined. The Señor was a doctor. What was to be done.

"I'll come and see the doctor. Tell him to wait a moment," Lionel said, and slipping on a

dressing-gown followed the manager to a distant part of the building where the servants slept; and there in a small bedroom a Spanish doctor—whom he knew slightly and liked—was standing by the side of Madeleine's bed, his fingers on her wrist.

Her big, frightened, dark eyes met Lionel's with an expression he was not easily to forget, but her fears quieted somewhat as he spoke to her and assured her that the attack was a light one and she would have every care. He arranged with Doctor da Mendoza that she be removed immediately to Ancon Hospital, then returned to his room and dressed, swallowed a hasty cup of coffee, and himself superintended the removal of the unfortunate woman.

It was late by then, and he could only leave a note for Simone saying he would be back as early as he could for dinner; and although he realized how angry she would be, he felt he cared very little, for her action over her maid's illness had not only enraged but dismayed him. He had a terrific amount of work to do in the day, preparing for the establishment of a proper district hospital at Culebra, where the camp was speedily growing into a permanent town, the personal inspection of those places that were still unsanitary and would not yield to the lesser authority of the

inspectors, the treatment of the sick, and the mass of detail as to equipment that no one could attend to but himself.

It was very much later than usual when he arrived at the hotel and, after changing, went into the sitting-room and found Simone waiting for him.

"I hope you did not wait dinner," he said formally. "Work kept me."

She laid aside the paper she had been reading and looked up at him.

"Yes, I waited," she said. "I wish to speak to you."

Her tone flicked him on the raw, but he gave no sign. "About Madeleine?" he asked, and a faint hardening of her jaw told him he had guessed rightly.

"Yes," she said; "I understand it was by your orders she was removed to Ancon."

"It was."

"What do you propose that I should do?"

"Surely you can get a maid here? She will not be so good, naturally, but that is unavoidable. Did you know Madeleine was ill?"

"I knew last night that she was not well; but she is so hysterical that I put it down to panic."

"Was that the message you received just after dinner?"

Simone inclined her head.

"It was. Have you many more questions to put to me?"

"Only one. Did Madeleine complain of definite symptoms last night?"

"She chattered a great deal, and cried, and said her head ached, and she had some pain. But she is always imagining herself to be ill. I am sorry, but since she is having all possible attention, I hardly see why we need waste our entire evening discussing her."

Lionel moved over to the window. He felt tired and sick at heart, and the discussion did, in truth, seem hardly worth continuing. It was not so much his wife's conduct with regard to the unfortunate maid, as the realization of the character that made such conduct possible. That Simone was selfish he knew, but that she was heartless he had not dared to let himself believe; now it was no longer a question of daring. The ugly fact lay before him in all its nakedness. He stood so long silent, gazing out into the moonlit world beyond the windows, that Simone's control snapped.

"If you cannot make an effort to entertain me, after I have been all alone all day, it seems rather unnecessary for me to remain here at all. My society is evidently of no value."

He turned round, frowning a little.

"I am sorry," he said. "It must be very dull

for you"—what use to be angry, no anger could pierce the polished hardness of her egotism—"And I am being transferred on Monday to Culebra. There are a few houses. We could have one, but you would find it impossible."

She had not expected acquiescence, and his lack of attempt to change her opinion brought her to the realization of danger. For a moment she, too, was silent, then she spoke in her usual manner:

"I do not see why. It would be a change, and at least there is work to watch. Can I come over and see the place?"

"Come over?" he echoed. "It's a waste, with rough shacks and huts; an attempt at the beginning of a town, and work everywhere."

"Would you like me to come?" her voice was suddenly soft and very low, and at the tone, he looked at her sharply, then came across the room and stood in front of her.

"Not unless you would be happy," he said, and cursed himself because his pulses quickened at the look in her eyes, as she raised them—this damnable weakness of the flesh . . . how it betrayed and degraded, how it mastered the will, and made nothing of the immortal spirit . . . her arms raised languidly, rested about his neck, her slender body touched his . . . with swimming brain he lifted her in his arms, and carried her across to the couch.

CHAPTER IX

Two incidents filled Lionel's thoughts the next day; the first, a cable from Enid, saying that they were starting on a three months' vacation before Gaston took up his appointment in Rome, and would call at Colon; the second, a meeting just outside the hotel with none other than Lockhart, who was hurrying along, and stopped him almost violently.

"Look here, you're in close touch with Crawford—for God's sake get him to see me. I'm ill—my head has ached all night, and I've a tongue like sulphur—I'm ill, I tell you! I've got to get home. I've got to get away from this hell-hole —get me to Crawford—quick!"

The contrast between the boisterous complacency of the night before and the abject panic of to-day was not pleasant to behold. Lionel tried to reassure him, but he would have none of his comfort. He must see Crawford and no one but Crawford, and since he was an official of some importance Lionel took him to the Colonel's quarters and left him to go on himself to Culebra, dully tired and heavy at heart.

The day's work was much as usual, save that it increased in heaviness; and on his return home he found the news that the public thought had been mere gossip, authenticated—a new governor was arriving immediately, and Lionel remembering his conversation with Crawford, could only hope he would uphold Crawford. The old saying that the darkest hour is before dawn proved true once again, however.

Simone, as if to eradicate the memory of the previous twenty-four hours, had asked Robert and one or two of Lionel's colleagues to dinner, and the evening, despite anxiety, was a very pleasant one. Madeleine was reported a very light case, Enid's cable caused great satisfaction, the new governor, Magoon, was known, so Schofield assured them, to be an excellent and capable man. There was the usual shop talk; the battle of the levels, the dilatoriness and neglect of the Commission in sending medical supplies, the unfriendliness of the Panamanians, and the general disturbance of working plans. But Simone appeared amused and interested, she took immense trouble to make her guests enjoy their evening, and Lionel reproached himself for his bitter thoughts.

His own removal to Culebra was delayed owing to Crawford's orders, for another complete fumigation of Panama and Colon; and, that completed,

a fresh bombshell descended on the staff in the shape of the resignation of the chief-engineer, Mr. Wallace.

To estimate the confusion and dismay which this resignation caused was, for anyone not on the spot, almost impossible.

There were heated discussions—the merits and demerits—as to Mr. Wallace's action, much bitterness of feeling, and an utter sense of mystery as to the reason. That the famous engineer had had ceaseless trouble with the first Commission was an established fact; but the second Commission had met with his approval, he had expressed his satisfaction not only with its reorganization, but with his own position. The attitude of Washington was one of extreme disappointment and displeasure, and Mr. Taft, then Secretary of War, wrote a letter that allowed of no misunderstanding as to his opinion. Mr. Wallace's defence of his action was that he was not allowed a free rein in the management of affairs, although more highly qualified than Mr. Shonts, with whom he was to work, and who had a verbal agreement with the President that he could do as he thought fit. Mr. Shonts was not an engineer, and Mr. Wallace therefore considered the position impossible. A defence that was adequate but unsatisfactory to the general belief, which was that something else lay

at the back of the whole affair, which was never publicly explained by either Mr. Wallace or the Administration.

The new governor's action, however, gave fresh courage to the distracted Sanitation Authorities, and while the whole engineering side of the work rang with passionate and dismayed discussions, the medical side found itself understood and swiftly aided.

Magoon saw how desperate matters were, and cabled to Washington, not only for supplies to be immediately sent, but for much greater freedom of action and larger supplies of money. The movement at home to supersede Crawford was, partially owing to Magoon's indignant remonstrance, crushed once and for all by President Roosevelt, and Colonel Crawford was given what amounted almost to a free hand to organize the necessary sanitary reforms.

Then came the appointment of a new chief engineer, John F. Stevens, one of the finest "construction" men ever produced by the States, who knew his job from A to Z, and had a genius for creating *esprit de corps*. An engineer whose brain was brilliant, a "boss" who could get work out of his men, and who worked with them with indefatigable cheeriness and industry—patient with a mistake, infuriated by laziness; in a few weeks,

a new spirit began to permeate the entire force, and the staff employees began to cease wondering if the canal could ever be built or whether they were headed for disaster like the French.

Robert, full of enthusiasm, met his brother late one night.

"All excavation stopped till the level is settled," he exclaimed. "The boss has taken hold of the railroad, and is going to put the whole thing on a proper basis. New rolling-stock, heavy rails to be laid—everything that's wanted, and the first thing to be tackled is the building of houses, the construction of docks, and the whole canal zone planned out to house, and house decently, thousands of men. He knows his job—by heaven, he does! Now we'll get on to real work."

The support given by Magoon to all medical matters, and the change of method inaugurated by Stevens, speedily showed results. The epidemic of yellow fever began to subside, the sense of tension among the employees to slacken; the construction gangs, the engineers and, indeed, the whole force began to work better, and a spirit of hopefulness crept into men's hearts. In late September the fever had almost entirely disappeared, and, though malaria still claimed its many victims, the fear of a panic from the peril of yellow fever was no longer in the minds of the authorities.

It was, therefore, with a real sense of pleasure that Lionel looked forward to the arrival of his sister and brother-in-law, and, since Culebra was by now established as a small but rapidly growing town, he believed that he would be able to entertain them in his own house.

Since the scene about Madeleine, Simone had been her most charming self, as if she had determined to eradicate the unfortunate impression her conduct then had made upon her husband. She had been interested in the work around her, patient with the few wives who had accompanied their husbands to the Isthmus, pleasant to Lionel, and to his friends a delightful hostess. An Indian summer of content seemed to brood above the marriage, yet in his heart of hearts Lionel could not forget. He hated himself for his too-vivid memory, yielded himself to the pleasure she offered, stifled thought with her beauty and with the more healthy anodyne of hard work, yet, at idle moments, that ugly little scene flashed back into his brain and he saw once again the hostility in her eyes as she looked at him.

He deputed Robert to meet the ship at Colon on which Enid and Gaston were travelling; for it had been arranged to his own surprise that, instead of the long and stormy passage round the Horn, they were to visit the Isthmus, travel across it and rejoin the ship several weeks later at Panama.

It was a Sunday when the s.s. *Angareb* docked at Colon: a day in February, the middle of the dry season, and therefore rather less wet and humid than the days of the other nine months of the year; and Robert, his height making him conspicuous, found himself in the midst of a crowd on the quay, waving his slouched grey felt to his sister whom he discerned at the rail of the boat-deck, slim and tall, and elegant as ever.

"Enid! Gaston! There's Robert! Look!"

Dolores, her eyes shining like stars, her cheeks carmine, caught Enid's arm and shook it; and Enid, three minutes later, when Robert was on deck, held him in her arms for a very long moment, unutterably thankful that this darling younger brother had come unhurt through the dread perils of the last year.

Then, amazed and delighted, Robert turned to his young cousin.

"Dolores! What, in heaven's name, are you doing here? I thought you were safely with Lady Flora in London."

"Enid brought me. Wasn't she a dear? She knew how desperately I wanted to see the Canal——"

"And me!"

"And you, of course? How strange to see this place again. Has it altered?"

"Not much. Enid, Lionel is expecting you at his place to-night, and to-morrow he'll take you in to the Tivoli hotel at Panama. Look here, give me all your luggage checks, and I'll have young Bulmer see to it and get it across. All your stateroom stuff we can get now—if you want it to-night."

"Enid thought there might be difficulty in handling too much luggage," Gaston remarked, "so these three cases will see us comfortably through two days," and Robert nodded vigorously.

"Good for Enid. Then Bulmer can see to all the rest and you can come on the train right away."

Less than an hour later they were all four in the train and Robert, his arm through that of his sister, was talking nineteen to the dozen, as the train jolted through the low-lying swamps of the Chagres river valley, till it began its slow climb to the summit of the Cordilleras—here no great height.

"If they adopt the lock type this will most of it have to go," he said, in answer to some question of Gaston's. "The line will have to be high level and it will have to run on the east side of the Canal, since both Colon and Panama, the terminal points, are on the east."

"I can't get used to the points of the compass!" Dolores wailed. "A canal through the Isthmus

ought to run east and west, and you say it runs north and south."

"And also that the Pacific entrance is to the east of the Atlantic," Enid added. "It is confusing. I must re-study my geography. Tell me—how is Lionel? And does Simone like life at an engineering camp?"

"Lionel is working like a horse," Robert said rather evasively, "and Simone is the most popular person on the Isthmus. She's a perpetual surprise to the nice home-loving Americans and completely subjugates all the husbands."

Enid noticed the evasion, but said nothing, knowing she would very soon see for herself, and Dolores made no comment and only gazed eagerly at the half-remembered scenes beyond the track.

CHAPTER X

Dinner was over, coffee was on the little table in the close-screened veranda, and Simone was talking to Enid, while Dolores, a little apart, sat looking through the mesh at the moon rising slowly in the east—a great round moon, honey-coloured in a sapphire sky—and wished she could go out.

The men had not yet joined them, and she felt vaguely unhappy. Simone had been quite charming to her, but the old feeling of dislike had deepened to one of intense antagonism, and she was worried with herself that such should be the case.

Lionel she had not yet seen, for on their arrival, two hours ago, a message had come saying he was detained and would return about nine-thirty, and Dolores waited, wondering if he were happy and if he would be just the same as ever or if his marriage had changed him.

Presently Enid and Simone went into the house, and Dolores, asking if she might stay where she was, lay back in the long cane chair and watched

the moon. So this was Lionel's home, this square box of a house in the new little town just above the great Culebra Cut, of which she had read so much in Robert's letters, a house which looked rather like a gigantic meat-safe, all closely-screened with fine-mesh wire—the idea brought a smile to her lips. And Simone's home; what did it feel like to have a home of your very own? It must be rather wonderful. Dolores had no sense of self-pity, she was too sweet-natured for that, but she did sometimes wish that there was somewhere in the world where she had the inalienable right to be. Some place which was hers and hers alone, and not the home of other people graciously extended to herself.

Hertebury House never seemed home . . . it was a strange, great, gloomy place, and the Abbey—she had never seen it since her father's death; it had been so dear to her, so wrapped up with her childish memories, and she longed to go back. But with whom? When?

Nicolas, after that one strange scene on the morning of Simone's wedding nearly two years ago, had returned to his shell; she had only seen him once, and then at Lady Flora's, when he had attended a family dinner and she had seen him for a few minutes at dessert—and very bad-tempered he had been . . . funny to have a brother

who took no interest in you . . . and now the prospect of going to Lady Flora's and no longer living with Enid and Gaston, of being once more a member of that comfortable, regular uninteresting household . . . even the excitement of presentation at Court in June and of "coming-out" was damped. To leave the schoolroom under Enid's wing and attend the delightful parties she attended would have been wonderful—Enid's diplomatic circle was where Dolores, thanks to the late Duke's upbringing, would have been happy; but Lady Flora's friends were a very different matter.

Dolores felt she was ungrateful, and tried to realize that this separation was at least two months away, and then, startled out of her reverie by a sound, glanced round and saw Lionel standing looking at her.

He had come home late, had entered unnoticed, as he wished, to change and bathe, and knowing Enid was with Simone, had come downstairs to greet Gaston first. But Gaston, careless of risk, had walked with Robert to the edge of the great Cut to see the progress of excavations, and Lionel, coming into the veranda in search of coffee, had found Dolores.

The moonlight streaming on her face gave it an unearthly pallor and an equally unearthly

beauty; never guessing she had accompanied Enid, he stood staring, believing himself dreaming, till she started and sat up, turning towards him, and then he saw it was the living Dolores—the same sweet child's face—the same yet changed—Dolores with a light that was radiance itself in her eyes and smile as she cried out his name.

He started violently, like a man jerked out of a deep sleep, took two swift strides to her and her hands in his, and looked deep into her grey eyes—too deep . . . holding her hands closely.

"I thought I was dreaming!" he said. "They never told me—why, little Dolores——"

"I'm not little any longer!" she exclaimed, and laughed happily since he was the same—always the same—"I am eighteen now, and Enid brought me for a last trip before I have to leave them. Are you glad I came?"

He was staring at her so oddly that her confident joy in his presence faded.

"What is it?" she asked rather pitifully, her eyes searching his face. "I know you and Simone didn't expect me, but I thought—I imagined you wouldn't mind—Enid thought——" she checked herself, searching his eyes, and he spoke with sudden roughness.

"Dolores——" he cut short her perplexed

words. "Don't you know I'm glad? Don't you know how——?"

It was his turn to check himself and he stood quite still, gripping her hands hard, then he closed his eyes for an instant as if to shut out some vision he dared not regard, and releasing his right hand passed it across his forehead.

"Simone and I are delighted you came," he said quietly. "Enid was quite right, and so were you."

Puzzled, yet oddly reassured, she sat down again in the long cane chair, and, relieving a situation that threatened difficulties, Enid's voice called from the house:

"Lionel! Lionel! Oh my dear——" followed by Enid herself, who came out, hands eager for the touch of him, more reassured than she had hoped by the apparent success of this most extraordinary marriage.

Later, when they all sat in Simone's living-room—an odd setting, as Enid realized, for her exotic type, with its cane chairs and almost frugal furnishing—Gaston spoke of his new appointment and broke the news of altered arrangemen s.

"We have to catch a ship for San Francisco in four days' time at Panama," he said. "I have to take up my job a month earlier than

was at first arranged, and that means changes all round."

"In four days?" Simone echoed. "My dear boy, how absurd! Do you mean to say you are leaving again at once? And Enid?"

Enid being, perhaps, about the one person of whom she was genuinely fond, there was sincerity in her dismay and Lionel echoed it with more disgust.

"What a damned shame! We thought you were here for a reasonable time. There is so much to see."

"I know. I'm as sick as a dog about it, but I've no choice. Spare us all the time you can."

Robert, lounging on the great couch that Simone had insisted on having sent down from New York, put out a hand and gently tweaked Dolores' hair.

"Grown up and everything!" he teased. "How does it feel?" and before she realized had deftly removed two or three pins and sent the golden-brown mass tumbling about her face.

Flushed and indignant she turned on him, and Simone's clear cool tones broke on the resultant laughter like ice.

"Dolores is evidently only grown-up in appearance. Her behaviour is certainly that of the nursery still."

Instantly Dolores stopped her vigorous punishment of her cousin, the colour flamed in her face, and snatching the tortoise-shell pins from him, she twisted up the curly strands with hands that suddenly shook, whereupon Lionel got to his feet with an abrupt movement that startled his sister beside whom he was sitting.

"If you are to see one quarter of the things we want to show you, it's time we all went to bed," he said. "Robert, take yourself off. Simone—what about the morning?"

Dolores, very straight and slim, stood looking out of the window as Robert made his farewells, but as he paused by her side she glanced at him her eyes dark and stormy.

"I wish I could come with you," she said in an undertone, "I don't want to stay here——"

"It's Lionel's house, not hers," Robert said in the same quick aside. "Don't take any notice. I'm sorry I ragged you, sweetheart."

She managed to smile at him, but she avoided Lionel's eyes as she said good night and endured Simone's touch of finger-tips; then she was in the little room that Simone had had hastily prepared, next to that of Enid and Gaston. Once alone she was young enough and sensitive enough for tears of anger to well into her eyes, for her pride had been hurt, she had been made to look ridiculous

and by Simone. She hated her—she could not understand Lionel loving her—she was hard and cruel beneath that beautiful surface, and she had sneered at her, Dolores, as she always did.

The knowledge that Simone disliked her had first awakened the child's antipathy, but now she was puzzled by its manifestation. After all, why should Simone be so antagonistic? What had she, Dolores, ever done, that Simone should deliberately attempt to make her ill at ease? And Lionel loved her—her—what a queer thing love was. She hoped she would never love a man who liked to hurt other people as Simone did—and then, quite suddenly, her good sense came to the rescue. This was contemptible and wrong and discourteous. She was probably just imagining Simone's dislike, and at all events she was her guest and must behave decently, and not be ready to take offence where no offence was intended; with which excellent resolve she undressed and went to bed and to sleep, content that she was at last on the Isthmus of Panama.

The next two days passed like a flash; Enid and Gaston, both intensely interested in the gigantic enterprise, saw everything that was possible in the short time, one of the higher officials taking them around, and on the day before they were to join their ship at Panama they examined the old city,

inspected Ancon hospital, met Major Crawford and went on to the Tivoli Hotel, where they were to spend the night, as the ship was expected to sail early on the Friday.

Being the dry season, the weather was not too trying, and Dolores, who was full of eagerness to see everything, could not understand why she felt headachey and stupid, why her legs should ache and her skin feel alternately hot and cold. She fought the discomfort gallantly and would probably have succeeded in getting through the day without betraying herself, but for the fact that Lionel, having a few hours off duty, suggested their visiting the quarters being prepared for the negro labourers which Gaston was particularly anxious to see, and that necessitated a rough walk along the railway track to one particular district that Major Greenfell, the official who had the arrangements in charge, considered the best example.

Stepping from the rough path up a steep little gradient, Dolores slipped and Lionel, catching her hand, was horrified to find it burning; instantly checking himself by letting the others pass; then spoke quietly, watching her.

"No. Stand still a moment," he said. "How long have you been like this, Dolores?"

"I'm all right," she said, trying to evade his glance. "Oh, please, cousin Lionel——"

"Oh, please, Dolores—no, my dear; I'm sorry, but this won't do. You've fever on you and you mustn't keep about."

"Oh, but I must! The ship to-morrow—oh, oh, please, don't let Simone know!"

"Simone?" he looked at her sharply. "What has Simone got to do with it?"

Horrified at her slip, Dolores tried to cover it.

"I only meant she'd think I was making a fuss for nothing. I'm all right—really. It's only just that I'm hot."

"Come along, Lady Dolores—come along, Kent——" Greenfell glanced back, calling them; but at the latter's gesture he stopped and looked from Enid to Gaston.

"Your brother wants us. One moment, Madame de Melancourt," and leaving them in the middle of the track he retraced his steps to be stopped by Lionel's brief explanation.

"Lady Dolores is not well. Touch of fever or the sun. Ask my sister to come here."

The next moment Enid was beside them, Dolores hand burning between hers.

"Good heavens! child; you're like a furnace! Lionel—what must we do?"

"I'm all right. It's nothing—please, Enid! Please, Lionel!" Dolores exclaimed in great distress; but Lionel cut her short putting

his arm round her in contradiction to his curt words.

"Be quiet, Dolores. Don't be worried. Ancon, Enid. Everybody has to be marched off. I'm sorry, but this means you'll have to sail without her."

"Sail without whom?"

Annoyed at the delay and wondering at its cause, Simone had left Gaston and come back to them, and at her question Enid spoke quickly, her voice sharp with anxiety.

"Dolores has got a touch of fever. Lionel says she must go straight to bed."

Simone gave Dolores one quick look.

"My dear Lionel, don't be impossible. I can't have invalids in the house. Surely, if she must be ill, she can be looked after on the ship. And is it necessary for you to hold her up?"

There was an instant's silence, and Lionel felt a little quiver run through the slim figure at his side, followed by a stiffening and a quick determined withdrawal, but before she could speak he had given his wife her answer.

"There is no question of your having an invalid in the house, but neither is there any question of the ship. Dolores will go to Ancon hospital, and I am going to take her straight there

now. Perhaps you, Enid, would like to come with me? Gaston will accompany Simone."

His voice was like ice, his eyes matched it; without a further look or word for Simone, he lifted Dolores in his arms and carried her down the rough slope to the road they had left, Enid following, her face pale, but a smile on it for Dolores, whose lips, despite their close set, quivered every now and then like a hurt child's.

On the road, in the shade of a little group of palm trees, he put her down and turned to his sister.

"Stay with her here in the shade. I'll get a carriage—oh, there's one!"

He hailed a little carozza type of public carriage, ambling along the sun-drenched road, lifted Dolores in, and himself sat beside her.

"Lean against me," he said curtly, for Dolores was sitting stiffly upright although the road and the carriage and the green palm-trees were whirling about her; but she took no notice, only two tears crept below her down-dropped lashes, and Lionel seeing them felt the bitter anger in his heart like a physical thing. Quietly he put his arm round her, and despite her effort of will she collapsed against him, while Enid, her face very grave, watched her from the opposite seat.

The drive seemed endless, the horse, the slowest

in the little ancient town, as it pulled the carriage up the long sloping road; but the hospital was reached at last and Dolores was helped down and taken in, realizing, now that the need for effort was over, that she really did feel exceedingly ill.

The cool little bed was relief beyond measure, and she wondered why Lionel looked so stern and even angry as he watched her; then the heaviness of fever took her, she ceased trying to make Enid understand how sorry she was, and instead fell into a doze.

"A touch of malaria—nothing very much, thank goodness," was the verdict later that night when Lionel had seen Dr. Schofield. "She'll be all right, I think. The temperature is a point down now and she is sleeping quite quietly. No chance of to-morrow's boat for her, though."

Simone had remained at the Tivoli Hotel, not through any particular anxiety about Dolores, but because she wished to see as much as possible of Enid and Gaston, and the three of them were sitting in the hotel lounge when Lionel came in with Dr. Schofield's report and his own opinion. Enid gave an exclamation of mingled dismay and relief, and Gaston said quickly:

"Thank the good God she is not in danger. The poor child." And Enid added: "I was

afraid—absurd of course, but I couldn't help it. Lionel, my dear, what am I to do? Gaston must get back without loss of time. I ought to be with him, but how can I go and leave her?"

"But she's all right," Lionel said, laying his hand over his sister's. "By to-morrow morning she ought to be much better. She will be excellently looked after and when she is quite recovered"—he paused a moment then said in rather a peculiar tone—"I will find someone suitable to bring her back."

"No reason why Hertebury should not fetch her," Gaston said. "It's time he took a little thought for his own sister. One thing—Simone can chaperone her here."

Lionel looked across at his wife, his eyes hard and cold.

"Yes. Simone can chaperone her," he echoed. "When she is quite recovered, of course. Until then we'll keep her at Ancon."

"There are always people going to New York," Simone said indifferently. "I am very glad to hear there is no need for anxiety. It is really very trying for you to have your visit so upset."

"Not half so trying as for her," Enid said, rather sharply, for once allowing herself the luxury

of snubbing her sister-in-law. "You speak rather as if she had deliberately chosen to have malaria."

"She certainly seems to have the gift of attracting attention," Simone said. "I suppose the excitement of seeing Lionel was altogether too much for her."

Her tone was bantering and there was a smile on her lips, but Enid looked at her intently for a moment, and Gaston, who seldom disagreed openly with his sister, turned to Lionel with a change of subject so deliberate as to be in itself a reproof.

"I hear the question of the levels will soon be settled by your Congress," he said. "A good thing for everyone concerned. Robert says every man on the construction side is restless and impatient at the long delay."

"It's been inevitable, I suppose. But I certainly hope it will soon be settled. There's a good deal of feeling here that the lock system will be easier and better. One thing the delay has done; it's given us time to get the fever in hand, and some of the more urgent construction work done. You've seen the beginnings of Culebra and the rebuilding—practically—of the railways. Well, there'll be half a dozen towns along the Canal before we're through and thousands of workers to be housed here."

The two men, as if by mutual consent, took refuge in the discussion of the work ahead of the Canal force—a masculine subject untouched by women's petty enmities and jealousies, while Enid wrote a long letter to Dolores, and Simone idly watched the other people in the hotel.

CHAPTER XI

"I FEEL so dreadfully sorry to have caused all this disturbance," Dolores said, stretching out a hand quite noticeably thinner. "Simone naturally must have felt most annoyed to have her little party spoiled."

It was late afternoon, and Robert, in Panama on an errand of importance for the chief engineer, had snatched a few moments to visit Dolores, who was sitting up for the second time in a quiet corner of the screened veranda. He had only seen her during the actual serious days of her illness, and this was his first visit since her convalescence, and he found her looking rather frail, but quite herself again, and was touched by the delight she showed at his arrival.

Now, in answer to her words, he took her hand in his and held it with a warm, reassuring pressure.

"What nonsense! Simone was very sorry for you—she'll be in to see you now you can have visitors," he said. "You are not to imagine things, you bad child."

Dolores shook her head.

"Please, don't let Lionel ask her to come, Robert. She was annoyed. She was afraid I should be on her hands in her house. She hates me, I think, and I don't know why. Robert—why did Lionel marry her?"

Robert made a grimace.

"Heaven knows. She's damned attractive to men, you know."

"I know. Nicolas loved her, didn't he?"

"Nicolas?" Startled, Robert stared at her. "I say—look here—what makes you think that?"

"I don't know. I suppose I just guessed. She's so beautiful, of course. It's funny, isn't it, Robert, when anyone has so much that they should grudge anyone else just a little."

"Meaning?"

She laughed a little and waved away the question.

"Don't pin me down. Besides, you know just what I mean. Simone's got so much—Lionel—and beauty—and a home of her own. A place she belongs. She hasn't got to be handed about like a parcel."

Robert, relieved to have skated successfully over such thin ice, took the cue instantly.

"Simone's not the domestic type. And most people would think you a darned sight more lucky!"

"Me?" Dolores stared incredulously. "Me? Why?"

"You are rich, you are the daughter of one Duke and the sister of another, and you are just as beautiful as Simone."

But at this last she burst out laughing, and do what he could she would not take the remark seriously, so that Lionel, coming in to see one of his patients from Culebra, following Robert's lead of stealing a few minutes to visit her, found her weak with amusement, and demanded to be told the cause.

Whereupon Robert got to his feet.

"I told her she was beautiful," he said. "Nothing so very funny in that, is there?"

Lionel looked at his brother, then at his young cousin.

"No," he said, "I don't see anything funny in it either."

"But beautiful!" Dolores' voice was scornful. "Why, he's ridiculous."

"Is he?" Lionel said dryly. "Well—that is a matter of opinion. I happen to agree with him."

"You?" The laughter died out of Dolores' face; she looked startled, almost angry.

"You're just teasing me. You needn't. Not about things like that."

"No," Lionel said quietly, "I'm not teasing

you. Robert is quite right. You were a beautiful child, Dolores, and you will be a beautiful woman."

There was a moment's silence, as she sat very still, unable to believe that he meant what he said —but his tone had not been a jesting one. After that pause she raised her eyes and looked at him.

"A beautiful woman?" she echoed hardly above her breath. "I never guessed it. How wonderful!"

He stood beside her chair, his face unsmiling.

"Yes. Very beautiful;" and then determinedly facing a subject he dreaded to discuss he sat down beside her.

"Dolores, you are well enough to be moved now," he said. "And I want to take you back to Culebra the day after to-morrow. Captain Cather will fetch you, and Simone is expecting you."

At the first mention of Culebra, Dolores' expression changed, and at the conclusion of his sentence she looked directly at him.

"If you please, I would rather not," she said. "Can I not stay here—I could be useful. I could nurse—or wait on people, or help with the wards generally."

"You would rather do that than come to my house?"

At such a question her face went rather white and there was pain in her eyes; she could not

answer, but her silence was eloquent, and he nodded.

"I am not surprised. But—listen, Dolores—when some people are anxious they grow irritable—not sure of themselves. They say foolish or careless things, not because they wish to be unkind, but because they are not, for the moment, master of themselves. Simone"—he tried to speak determinedly, to make her believe the lie—"Simone is like that. She has been living under a great strain. She was anxious—worried for you and Enid. You must forget——"

He felt that she saw through the wretched fabric of falsehood, felt too that she was as desirous as he of keeping up the pretence, for she nodded eagerly, her eyes losing their frankness and clouding with would-be candour that was a mask to hide what lay behind.

"Yes, yes, of course. It isn't that. Only, naturally, I don't wish to intrude—to force myself into your home. And neither you nor Simone can really desire me to be with you. It's not natural—you're happy—you only want each other——"

"Dolores, we both appreciate your feeling, but Simone asked me to say that it will give her the greatest pleasure to have you, and after all there is no need for you to demur. It is only a question

of a week or two until we can find you a chaperone to New York. Why, it is even possible that Simone herself will be travelling north for a visit."

"Is it?" Dolores looked at him with a perplexed gaze that, in some half-comprehended way, hurt him. He had never in the early days understood Simone's hostility to his cousin, and now misunderstanding had passed into anger and disapproval. Laying his hand over Dolores' wrist, he said more gently.

"Dolores, if you don't come, I shall be very disappointed and very hurt. Won't you put those unfortunate words of Simone's out of your memory and believe that we really want you?"

"If you mean that, of course I will," she said. "Have I been very much of a nuisance, cousin Lionel?"

"No," he said, and though the answer was so brief it satisfied her and settled her fears about her reception at Simone's hands.

Two days later, Cather came for her, and about tea-time she arrived at Culebra, inwardly nervous, but to outward appearances unself-conscious as usual.

Culebra, after the vegetation and age of Panama, and the glorious view of the Pacific and the islands from Ancon Hill, looked raw and new and bare; the houses in their wire-screens like dolls'-

houses dressed up as meat-safes, the great Cut through the hills like a gash in the earth's living breast, yet for the moment it was home; home because Lionel was here, the one person on whom she could depend in a world so unstable and unfriendly.

A Japanese servant met her, took her light luggage, and led the way on to the wide veranda, where tea was laid and where Simone, fresh and cool in pale lavender, rose from a chaise-longue and held out her hand to Cather.

"How good of you to bring this invalid child of ours back!" she said as he held her fingers an instant longer than was necessary. "Dolores, I expect you feel very shaken after your journey. Malaria pulls one down so, doesn't it? You must have some tea and then lie down."

She smiled at her as she indicated a chair, and Dolores, relieved, yet still a trifle uncertain, sat down and drank her tea thankfully, while Simone talked to Cather and presently accompanied him to the roadway, when he took his leave.

Bare as the house was, Simone had succeeded in stamping it with her taste, and it had a charm that its severity rather enhanced; books and journals were in profusion and the chintzes were fresh and crisp, despite the terrible damp heat. Culebra might be a raw spot in the midst of a great

engineering dump, but here was one house that had within it beauty and culture.

When Simone came back, she was singing a tune from Massenet's *Manon* in a clear, mezzo voice and Dolores looked up startled.

"Simone! I didn't know you sang! Your voice is lovely——"

Her enthusiasm was so sincere that Simone for the moment responded.

"Do you think so? I studied several years under Lilli Lehmann, so it should be good. We will have some music after dinner, but you must not expect too much of the piano. The wires rust, despite all my care, in this steamy damp."

"There is an opera house at Panama, Robert tells me," Dolores said. "Do you go often?"

"There are hardly ever any performances, but we have quite amusing dances at the Tivoli Hotel and at some of the American houses. I like the American dancing."

"You are very lucky to be out here, seeing new things and leading so different a life to anything in Europe," Dolores said, eager to keep up the conversation. "It must be so wonderful to have done and seen things and then to come out here. And the work! It's fascinating to watch such a big thing as the Canal come into being."

"Oh—that!" Simone shrugged her shoulders.

"Yes, it's all very interesting of course, but after all it's difficult to find one's supreme interest in steam-shovels, paraffin sprays, and whether the Commission will sanction another ton of sulphur for fumigation. Those are the staple interests of conversation on the Canal zone. Oh—by the way, I forgot to tell you. A Mrs. Saltzsmann, the wife of the medical officer at Colon, is travelling to New York on Wednesday. She will be willing to look after you, and I will arrange for you to be met there and chaperoned across. I have cabled Lady Flora Townley."

Dolores turned round to twist the cushion behind her head to a more comfortable angle, because she felt at that instant the imperative need to keep her face hidden. She had been secretly hoping that Lionel would arrange for her to prolong her visit and enable her to see more of the work that had so fired her imagination, but evidently he had not done so. Once again she was to be handed on, got rid of, kindly and courteously enough, but got rid of nevertheless, with relief. . .

She supposed there would come a time when she might perhaps be permitted to have a home of her very own, where the sense that she was unwanted would cease. If she married, sometime in the dim and distant future . . . but other girls had homes before marriages . . . places where

they belonged by right . . . people to whom they were not someone to be "arranged for," but the centre of affection . . . it would be queer to know you were supremely important to another human being. . . . When the cushion was settled she looked up and saw she was alone, and because she was still weak the tears trickled down her cheeks and she had to brush them impatiently away.

"Hullo, kidlet! Back again? That's good!"

Robert's voice broke the silence; by the time she fought back the surge of self-pity, and even as she sat up, he dropped down beside her and gave her a vigorous embrace.

"Bless you, it's good to see you up again, you poor little shrimp. I hated to see you lying at the hospital!"

His warmth of greeting, his kindly cheeriness, sent a little thrill of gratitude through her; slipping an arm round his neck, she rested against him as she had done so often as a child, and at that moment Simone came out on to the veranda. The first intimation they had of her presence was the interruption of Robert's explanation of the work of a crushing-plant by her cool voice, saying:

"Really, Dolores, don't you think you are too old to be quite so affectionate with men?"

Robert jumped as if he had been struck, then

controlling himself rose to his feet and pulled forward a chair, and Dolores said in a voice commendably steady:

"Robert is my first cousin, Simone. You forget."

"Oh, no! I assure, you I do not. 'Cousin' is so convenient a relationship. And while you are in my house, dear child, I must ask you to respect my wishes and refrain from being quite so—ingenuous."

The pause, the dropping of the last word into the silence was so deliberate that Dolores could not pretend to misunderstand its malice. Following Robert's example, she rose.

"I will certainly remember your wishes," she said. "And I forgot to thank you for arranging about my passage to New York next Wednesday week. I am so glad you were able to fix it so soon."

And without even a look at Robert she turned away and went into the house.

As the screen-door swung to behind her, Simone looked up and smiled.

"Sit down, Robert, and don't glare at me. The child really must learn that it's not the thing to be so affectionate. People will misunderstand."

"Not with me—you might as well pull her up for kissing Lionel——"

"I certainly should!" Simone said rather sharply. "She is nearly eighteen. Quite old enough to cease making herself cheap. Now, Robert, please don't look like that. You do not understand how careful a young girl in Dolores's position, and with her looks, must be."

Her words were reasonable, her manner kindly; Robert shrugged his shoulders, unable to reconcile her manner to Dolores with her eminently sensible explanation, but since he had no desire, for Dolores' own sake, to take her part too obstinately and alienate his brother's wife, he let the matter drop.

"All right. You bring up girls differently in France, of course. There's a dance next Thursday at the Tivoli—will you come? It'll do Lionel good."

Simone was not quite satisfied with him; she wondered if he would repeat what she had said to Lionel; and, since she had no desire that he should do so, she made a swift decision.

"I think it would. Suppose we all go together, and I will bring Dolores as a little festa after her bad luck? She can dance with you and Lionel, even if she is not out yet, and after all no one can call this a social function of any importance."

Robert was delighted at the suggestion and said so, and, content that she had erased any unfortun-

ate impression from his mind, Simone changed the subject and, when he rose to leave a few minutes later, she kissed him lightly on either cheek and was content that she felt him tremble at the contact.

As for Robert, he left the house and Culebra for Colon, where he had orders to check some newly-arrived stores. The job would take him most of the next day he knew, and he had intended to ask for a bed at his brother's and catch the earliest construction train into Colon, but the little scene with Simone had made him change his mind, and as he sat in the shaky truck he had boarded he was relieved to have left.

Curse women . . . they made all the trouble in the world . . . upset a man's peace of mind, spoiled his work, maddened him, shamed him . . . a woman with pale gold hair and slender limbs, a woman who made a man, at least in his thoughts, forget decency and honour and the ties of blood, who could make him oblivious to everything but his desire for her body . . . a woman whose embrace was poison passionately hungered for . . . poison that must drag down its victim to the depths.

It was dawn before he sought his room in a little hotel in Christobel, the name of the part of the city of Colon that lies on the American side of the dividing line, and he was tired out as much with the mental as with the physical strain of the

night hours, for he had tramped the city and its environs, heedless of possible danger from man or insect, fighting with himself and facing the prospect of a future which he dreaded.

He was up at his usual hour, down at the docks, and for a couple of hours was superintending the unloading and entraining of certain machinery, a proceeding that meant the utmost care.

Somewhere about eleven, on a light engine that had come across specially, one of the senior officers arrived from Ancon, and with him and Lionel Robert saw, to his amazement, Dolores looking cool and fresh in white muslin and a big, flower-wreathed hat. They came across the dusty stretch of railway yard to where the ship was docked, and Robert, able for the moment to leave the men to their task, went to meet them, and Lionel nodded him a greeting.

"Good morning. Rather unexpected, aren't we; but there's a second inspection of this boat to be carried out."

He signed to the s.s. *Halcis*, and Lionel added in an undertone as his companion walked on:

"She's been inspected already, as you know, but there's a report come through that there has been sickness on board. I'll have to stop the work for a little, but won't hinder you longer than we can help. Dolores was feeling so much better

and was so anxious to see Colon, that we brought her along. Don't stay in the sunshine too long," he turned to Dolores, who was looking eagerly about her. "We shan't be more than an hour. Robert, find her a shady seat in the breeze when she's ready to rest."

He went after his colleague, and Robert turned to his cousin.

"This is jolly," he said, "for me. But won't you be dull?"

"Dull? I'm thrilled to see something of the actual work at last! Why, I've so tired of just sitting about, I don't know what to do. I want to see actually the construction—the place—everything about it."

Robert smiled down at her.

"Good for you! I can leave these blighters five minutes so we'll stroll along and I'll point out the sights. Come on." And she came. He passed his handkerchief over his wet face and strolled along the dock side to stretch his legs. The morning was rarely dry for it had not rained for two days, but the heat was terrific. Behind the docks and railway-yards the town sweltered and steamed, the buildings mostly single-storied with corrugated iron roofs, and here and there the barn-like halls of the saloons. The wharves were busy despite the heat, the huge ugly sheds full of freight

and humanity, the latter black, brown, yellow, unloading or loading wares. Beyond the wharves and buildings a row of tall palm trees bowed before the hot sea wind like dancers for regularity, and the crash of breakers despite an oily sea was unceasing.

Christobel, a little farther from the docks, had not quite the hideousness of Colon, since trees made splashes of shade; the houses—those outside the coloured quarter—were less ugly in shape, there was grass in the little gardens and a church that looked as if it had been transplanted from an English village and was a marvel of imitative ability.

Dolores, intensely interested in all she saw, was still amazed and delighted at Simone's willingness to allow her to come out thus with Lionel on the little trip; she ignored the heat, although it made her pale and set beads of perspiration about her forehead, and Robert, as he exerted himself to explain detail, found her a delightful and intelligent companion.

He could not stay long, as it was impossible to leave his job, but after a few minutes he found her an impromptu seat in the shadow of a railway waggon where the breeze reached her and from where she could watch the unloading.

Presently, desirous of changing her position,

she walked a little way down the wharf and was turning back again to return when she saw something that halted her abruptly in her tracks—for there, not more than a mile away from shore across the heaving copper-hued ocean, was a large steam yacht, her white sides gleaming in the sunlight, her brasses twinkling and the Royal Yacht Squadron flag flying at her masthead.

For a full moment she stood staring, incredulous, then with an exclamation of wonder hurried back and waited in feverish impatience till she saw Robert had a moment's freedom, when, picking her way between bales and freight and shunted trucks, she stood beside him.

"Robert—the most wonderful thing——" she was almost incoherent with excitement. "It's the *Opal*—the *Opal*, don't you understand? Nicolas—he's there—not a mile off shore!"

"What?" Robert swung round, his breath coming short, "The *Opal?* Hertebury?"

"Yes! Nicolas! Isn't it splendid! He knew we were coming—but I've not seen him for ages——" Robert heard no more, too busy with his own thoughts.

So Nicolas had followed Simone. He had never intended to give her up—he was coming here and his, Robert's, lips were sealed. He could say nothing, do nothing; he could only stand

by and watch and wonder if Simone cared enough for Lionel to send her discarded lover about his business. Likely, wasn't it, when she would not even leave him, Robert, unimportant as he was, alone—when, even in spite of his position as her brother-in-law, she tried to make him show his desire for her. . . .

Dolores, amazed at his lack of response, shook his arm.

"Robert! Aren't you glad? When is Lionel coming off that tiresome ship—he'll be so surprised —and Simone——"

She broke off suddenly as the details of that last scene with her brother leaped vividly to her memory. . . . Nicolas must have cared for Simone then, but of course now it was all right; she was married, and he had come just to see her and Lionel . . . or, perhaps . . . had he come to see her, his sister? That would be most wonderful of all, for ever since that morning of Simone's wedding Dolores had cherished a secret, had planned out for herself a wonderful story where Nicolas would be the brother of her dreams, would desire her society, be deeply interested in all she did, tell her his troubles and joys—be the brother of romance and fairyland.

Warned by her questions, Robert tried to pull himself together.

"Yes—yes—of course. Look here, Dolores, you'd better not wait for Lionel—I'll——"

"Not wait?" Dolores' amazement made him realize that he was behaving madly. "But, Robert, don't be stupid! Simone is so fussy; she'd be furious if I went alone, and, besides, Nicolas will be here soon, and think how amazed he'll be to see me here at the dock!"

She was right of course; Simone would be furious. . . . Confused and helpless he saw Lionel descending the gangway from the s.s. *Halcis*, and realized that he must not give himself away.

At the same moment Dolores saw him and promptly leaving Robert hurried across and caught Lionel by the arm, eagerly giving him her news.

There was no mistake. The *Opal* lay to in the sunshine, rocking gently in the swell and waiting for the arrival of the electric Government launch with the doctor on board to certify a clean bill of health; and, for the first time since those glorious days of her childhood when she had been with her father roaming the world, Dolores found herself unchaperoned, accepted merely as a companion, treated by Lionel and the others as a reasonable human being who knew there was a lot of work to do and not much time to do it in.

She was marched off by a young American assistant of Robert's to lunch at the timber-built,

pleasant Washington Hotel; made to rest and lounge for an hour afterwards, and was fetched by Lionel who, had gone lunchless but for a cup of coffee hurriedly drunk during work.

As they left the hotel he looked at her keenly. "Not tired? Or dull?"

"Tired? Not a bit! Ever so much less than just sitting about at Culebra or Panama—and bored—how can you be so absurd? Why, I am so delighted at seeing the work—the details—I'd like to get right down into the Cut and watch the machinery—I'd like——"

"Why that's the most enthusiastic speech I've ever heard you make!" he said. "I didn't realize you were so keen. Are you as interested as all that? Why?"

She looked at him with the serious direct gaze of a child.

"Partly because of you," she said simply, "and partly because I'm so tremendously keen on the real big things—and this is so big! The whole world must be watching! I'd like to see everything—down to the last detail—have the things I didn't understand explained—if only there was time."

"It's too bad to send you home if you are so keen as all that. Would Lady Flora let you stay?"

"I think so. I'm not being presented till

June the 12th, and that's nearly three months off. Oh, Lionel! If only I could!"

"You'd like it as much as all that?" How adorable the child was with excitement making her eyes like stars and curving her mouth into smiles——

"I'd love it more than anything in the world!"

"Then I'm damned if you shan't stay—sorry, dear——"

"But Simone? I can't trust myself——"

"Leave that to me. If it's difficult at Culebra, I'll talk things over with Mrs. Schofield. She's charming and might be glad to have you with her. Pleased?"

"Pleased?" She stopped short in the deserted garden walk along which they were making their way to the docks under the shade of the "royal" palms. "Oh, cousin Lionel—you don't know—you can't——" and quite suddenly put her hands on the breast of his coat, pulled down his head and kissed him.

It had been the act, the caress, of a child, but it went through the man's nerves like an electric shock; he realized she was no longer a child, but a lovely young girl, fresh and innocent, and the relationship that permitted her to treat him with such welcome affection was a frail barrier to keep away danger—he cursed himself for even the

momentary emotion, not realizing how hungry he was for such warmth of tenderness, and laughed off the difficult moment; and luckily Dolores was far too excited over the possible extension of her visit, let alone Nicolas's arrival, to notice any disturbance in his manner, and to change the subject he spoke of the *Opal's* arrival.

"She'll dock in about twenty minutes now," he said. "The doctor's given her a clean bill. We'll wait for Nicolas and see what his plans are. Robert's gone on to the construction train already, so since you're happy you can wait and we'll see what Nicolas means to do. Good scheme, don't you think?"

"Perfect! I'm so surprised at Nicolas coming here. I wonder why . . . cousin Lionel, what did you find on the *Halcis ?* Anything to warrant the outbreak?"

"Plenty! We found a small flat tub under the steps going down from the wardroom, in which the stegomyia were breeding freely. The steward who kept the tub there died five days ago and the ship's surgeon died too. Why the devil wasn't that tub found and emptied? It was responsible for the entire epidemic of the ship. Tragic business. Hullo! The *Opal*'s nearly in!"

He was right, for the stately white yacht—one of the finest privately-owned vessels afloat—

was almost in harbour, and a quarter of an hour later docked at one of the wharves; and Dolores, pale with excitement, went aboard with Lionel.

Hertebury was waiting for them on the main deck, and at sight of his sister stopped short in his greeting.

"Good lord, Dolores, what are you doing here?"

So he had not come for her—she had known it all along, of course, but it had been good to pretend he cared; she was passionately grateful to Lionel because he put his arm round her shoulders, explaining lightly the reason of her presence, and at the mention of her fever Nicolas gave her a swift glance.

"Fever? Malaria?"

"Yes."

"Bad luck. You are an expert, I understand, my dear Lionel, so please keep her under your eye for a while."

"I was this very moment arranging it. What are your plans? We cannot give you very luxurious quarters at Culebra, but we shall be more than delighted if you will visit us."

Hertebury's smile was a little ironical as he held out his cigarette case.

"Thank you, but I will stay either here or at Panama and visit you for dinner. The yacht

will anchor off shore as far as possible. Which place do you recommend?"

"Panama. There's nothing to see or do here."

They talked for a little, drank excellent China tea in the shade of the bridge, with the ocean breeze faintly cooler now blowing about them; then it was arranged that Hertebury should travel through to Panama in the morning and put up at the Tivoli Hotel, while the yacht took on a few necessary supplies and waited for him at Colon.

CHAPTER XII

"So you see, my dear, I thought the best way was to pay you a surprise visit."

Simone and Hertebury were seated on the wide screened veranda of the Tivoli Hotel nearly a week later, a tea-table between them, Simone in her favourite pale lavender, Hertebury's dark colouring intensified by the white clothes he wore. His remark, following on an imperious question from Simone, was calculated by its implication rather than its words to give her pause. She was disturbed, not so much by his coming, since he was a born wanderer, as by his manner—a manner that seemed to her now and then to mask a hint of triumph—a suggestion that all the cards were not on the table. Yet what cause could there be for triumph? She was married to a man whose position was unassailable, whose wealth was great enough to protect her, and her conduct had always been discreet . . . such suspicion was absurd and putting it from her she shrugged her shoulders.

"My dear Nicolas, we are quite delighted to

have you here. But it is unlike you to stay so long in one place."

"I find it interesting," he said lightly, and the answer did nothing to reassure his hostess.

"Interesting?" she said rather sharply. "My dear Nicolas, since when have you been interested in engineering and the simple life?"

"For just so long as yourself," he retorted with a little bow. "It is always permitted a woman to change her opinions. May it not be permitted to a mere cripple?"

"Do not say that!" she said and shivered. "I hate you to speak so of yourself. It is not decent."

"My dear Simone, it is the truth, is it not?" his voice was amused. "And besides—are you really concerned about decency?"

She caught her breath in a gasp at the insult, and her eyes glittered behind their narrowed lids.

"How dare you speak to me so?" she said, in a low voice that shook with the rage that flamed through every nerve. "You forget yourself!"

"On the contrary, I forget nothing! Do you remember telling me, not once, but often, that should you marry, your marriage would change nothing? Do you?"

"I was a fool!" she said shortly, and he lifted his eyebrows mockingly.

"Possibly. That does not concern me. What concerns me are the words themselves."

She had regained her lost coolness, but her fingers still tightly gripped the arm of her chair.

"Indeed? May I ask you to be more explicit?"

He was silent a moment, then looked at her intently.

"I have stood aside for two years," he said. "I have waited for a letter, a sign, the knowledge of your home-coming. You have ignored my very existence. For all my—shall we say sentimentalities?—to you on your marriage, I intended to play the game if I could, because your husband and I have the same blood. I do not say it would have been possible, but I do say that if he had taken the trouble even to write to me, I would have tried. If you had told me you were supremely happy, I would have left you alone. I came to find out what I did not know——"

He paused, and she looked at him indifferently.

"And have you?"

"I have. You are as incapable of fidelity now as you were then. You know Robert, the young fool, is mad about you—very well. Instead of leaving him alone, you endeavour to force him into such a position that he will lose his head. When he has done that, you may or may not—it depends on his experience as a lover—grant him his desire

. . . after Robert's possibilities have been exhausted, it will be another man. Cather, I should imagine."

She was white now, with compressed lips and cold fury in her eyes.

"How much longer am I to stay here and listen to this outrageous nonsense?" she said between shut teeth. "I think you are mad, or drunk."

"No, my dear Simone, neither mad nor drunk —only intensely interested in your future. After Cather—it depends whether you stay here or return to Europe. Now I am rather a dog-in-the-manger. I do not see why you should leave me out of this distinguished company . . . in fact, I do not see why there should be any distinguished company at all. So I intend to stay here a little while longer and when next you feel the need of a change from your husband's embraces I shall be only too delighted to take his place!"

"You are a beast!" she said in a low intense voice. "You think because I allowed you to be my lover you have the whip-hand, do you? You're mistaken. You forget my husband. And now, please go."

He rose, took the heavy stick that rested against the chair, and stood looking at her, still smiling.

"Oh, no, not for a moment!" he said. "He is very much in my mind. But since he is not able

to keep you for himself, I consider I may as well reap the benefit as Robert. That is all."

She was quivering with a rage that checked speech; had they been in her own house she would have walked away and left him, but they were at the hotel, within the field of vision of many other people, and already this man with his dark, clever face, and his twisted back, and his great English title, was a marked figure all through the Zone. She was too much a woman of the world to betray herself in public, but the fury in her heart showed in her eyes as she looked at him.

"I never wish to see you again," she said, through shut teeth. "You are abominable. Don't dare to see me again alone."

He held out his hand, knowing many eyes were watching them, and smiled.

"Au revoir. Remember about Robert, won't you? Oddly enough, although he behaved abominably to me on the morning of your marriage, I like him enough not to want his life spoiled."

She was forced to take his hand, and his fingers gripped hers in a hard pressure; then he turned round and limped away across the veranda.

Since his arrival, Lionel had insisted on his wife and Dolores coming in to spend the week at the hotel, thinking it would be pleasant for Dolores to see something of her brother, and Simone to

have a change from Culebra. There was to be a dance given by the British consul that night, and he and Robert were both coming in, as were all those who could get away. The following morning was to have been the date of Dolores' departure for New York, but since Hertebury's arrival Simone had, to Lionel's surprise and relief, been much more kind to the child and showed herself quite willing for Dolores to prolong her visit. She suggested that if Nicolas was returning to England Dolores might go with him on the yacht, and if not, there would be someone travelling before June who would be willing to chaperone her, so that if she really wished to stay she might as well. The reason for all this was obscure to both her husband and Dolores, but it was sufficient that it existed, and Dolores was enjoying every moment and felt happy in Simone's new kindness. As for Simone, she was quick to realize that the young girl was a protection in case Nicolas should be indiscreet; and now that he had openly shown his hand, she determined to keep her as much as possible as a companion, for despite her assurance to him she was uneasy.

The dance was to be quite a big affair; there were officers from an English warship anchored off the Isthmus, several of the more important Spanish families in old Panama, and the chief

officers, both medical and otherwise, of the Canal force. At another time Simone would have hesitated before permitting Dolores to appear, but now she put such details aside; she could keep the child under her own eye, and such chaperonage would be an excellent excuse if she wished to avoid the Duke.

Dolores was radiant and wild with excitement; she dined quietly enough with Simone, Lionel and Robert, in the former's sitting-room, and at half-past nine, eyes shining, cheeks flushed, the frills of her white ninon frock foaming about her feet, and pale carnations in its deep, tight belt of folded satin, she accompanied Simone to the ball-room.

"I want the first dance mind, and the supper dance!" Robert said as they entered. "Mind she keeps it, Simone!"

"My dear boy, I cannot be at her elbow every moment!" Simone retorted—did he think she was a dowager and only intended to sit aside while the youngsters danced? "I am sure she will be delighted . . . but I thought the supper dance was with me? Did you forget?"

Robert flushed, unprepared for the attack, knowing well enough that the arrangement had never been mentioned, but he recovered himself instantly.

"I thought you had turned me down, since

you had not answered me!" he said. "I have been waiting patiently for a week."

"Well, your patience is rewarded—Dolores will forgive you, I know——" she smiled at Dolores like one conspirator to another, and Lionel came swiftly to the rescue.

"She's to have the supper dance with me," he said. "Will you, Dolores?" and Dolores, immensely flattered, said quickly:

"Oh, please, cousin Lionel!"

It was two hours later that Robert claimed his supper dance, a waltz, and took Simone from her partner to the ball-room; the band was good with the Latin sensuous beauty and the Latin perfection of rhythm, Simone was a born dancer and Robert a worthy partner. Giving herself to the music she also gave herself to him, and in the enchantment of such perfect movement, with the subtle fragrance and charm of her so close in his arms, anger, bitterness, resistance faded. His breath came unevenly, his pulses thudded; sensing his emotion, flattered, triumphant, Simone gave him one look from beneath half-closed lids, and as they drew near the doors to the garden guided him by a faint pressure to them.

"It's too hot," she said. "Come out and let us walk a little."

He followed her blindly out into the glorious

tropical moonlight, and walked by her side in a silence that seemed filled only by the beating in his brain, fighting blindly, yet fighting against the thing she had done to him; and Simone, knowing each move of the game, said no word but walked by his side till they drew near the palm-shadowed path by the low wall that bounded the garden. Then, gently, as if she had no inkling of the storm within him, she spoke:

"It was so hot in there, so crowded, but here it is quiet and beautiful—you are silent, Robert—did you want to go on dancing?"

He started at the sound of her voice, then spoke curtly.

"No," he said, and looked down at her.

"Then—why?"

The upward inflection of her voice, the look on her face, the sudden pressure of her fingers on his wrist—they maddened him, sent fire through his veins—with an effort that was physical in its intensity he drew back and began almost stupidly to walk down the path away from her, and after a moment she followed him.

CHAPTER XIII

Dolores, being at the age when food is unimportant, did not linger over supper, but suggested the gardens, and Lionel, entertained by her enjoyment of everything, willingly enough agreed. The moon was high in the heavens and the light was clear and strong in contrast to the dense blackness of the shadows; now and then a few clouds, heralds of the dry season's approaching end, floated across her silver disc; and Dolores was enchanted by the beauty of the scene. She walked along one of the farther paths, silent out of sheer delight, Lionel at her side enjoying a cigarette and the quiet, when turning a corner they saw two people in a patch of faint light before them. The man was standing back against the wall, and even in the dim light the strained harshness of his face was visible, and the woman, as they saw, laughed a little and said: "Robert!" in a voice that was low and intense, and going forward, put her arms round his neck, pressed close against him and kissed him on the mouth, caressing him with swift lascivious hands. He stood for a second rigid, then

with a smothered sound caught her violently to him, and a second later as violently released her, almost pushing her from him, and covered his face with his hands.

In the still night air, Simone's words, light and mocking, came clearly.

"My dear Robert, don't be so melodramatic! Are you reproaching yourself for a mortal sin because you have kissed me? How absurd!"

Robert jerked up his head, but Dolores could not see his face. What she did see was Simone's smile as she turned and walked away humming a little tune.

The whole scene had passed with the incredible swiftness of a dream, but at Simone's last words Dolores awakened to the sense of stark reality. That was Simone, the wife of the man by her side; without stopping to think she dragged at Lionel's arm.

"Come away—come away——" her voice was a whisper, but his stunned brain heard it and he let her lead him, unresisting, along the path towards the hotel. But before she reached the building she spoke:

"What are you going to do?" she said. "You must know before you go in—before you see her——"

She was surprised at herself, frightened at her

daring, yet obstinately determined not to let him go like this to be seen or questioned; and at her words he paused and looked at her, his face so harsh that the lines about the mouth and eyes looked like scars, the eyes themselves glittering, the mouth set in a little cruel smile.

"Do?" he said. "What is there to do? That was Simone, my wife, trying to seduce my brother . . . a pleasant thing to see, wasn't it?"

She shrank at the words and tone and he laughed a little.

"You don't like it put into plain English, do you? No women do. It offends their sense of delicacy. What they like to do is to make a man mad for their bodies, and laugh at him afterwards. It's more decent."

So this was what love meant—this . . . this the explanation of words only half-understood and carelessly dismissed, of phrases that had puzzled for the moment and then been forgotten . . . this was what kisses and tenderness and passionate joy in the society of one person led to . . . this was all it meant . . . a physical thing . . . revolting. . . .

Dolores, in the first stark light of knowledge so cruelly acquired, was sickened and helpless. She caught her breath in a little gasp as reaction took her.

"Don't!" she said brokenly. "Oh, no . . . no. . . ."

"I'm sorry," he said dully. "I shouldn't have said that to you . . . I . . . I am not quite sure of myself . . . you'd better leave me."

She wanted to get away by herself, to shut out this hideous thing, to hide herself . . . she felt ashamed, unclean . . . but into her mind, strangely enough, had flashed a long-ago memory, a child wild with grief, a man with strong, tender arms and words that, even then, reached down to and comforted her desolate soul. . . .

"It doesn't matter . . . don't send me away . . . you mustn't go in, mustn't see her . . . or Robert. Not yet, Lionel—what are you going to do?"

He looked at her white face and eyes, dark and dilated, and his own softened.

"Nothing yet," he said more gently. "Don't be afraid. Poor little Dolores . . . I've been a fool, haven't I . . . O God!"

His voice broke heavily and he covered his face with his hands, swaying like a drunken man; and helpless she stood by, unable to speak, not knowing what to do. But only for a moment did the weakness master him, then raising his head he took her hands in his and held them for a moment.

"Go indoors," he said. "Do this for me; don't let anyone guess anything has happened. If you're asked where I am, say I was summoned to the hospital . . . if you see Simone or—or——" he took his working underlip between his teeth and looked at her dumbly, and Dolores nodded.

"I can do it. I will. You're safe . . . yourself."

He pulled his hand away, covering his mouth and turning away, left her.

Afterwards, exhausted, as she lay fully dressed on her bed, she wondered at herself. She had gone in after a few moments, laughed, talked, danced, seen Simone, but managed to avoid her, and not till she had to dance with Cather did she deliver Lionel's message. He had accepted it as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world, saying only:

"What rotten luck, poor chap! Not even a dance in peace," and that was all. Robert had appeared later on, and once she had seen Simone go up to him, but he had made an excuse and gone away, and it was later in the evening before he came to her, Dolores, and asked for a dance.

Simone had come up at that moment, her eyes narrowed as they always were when she was about to strike, and Dolores was not in the least surprised at her words

"My dear Dolores, isn't it about time you went to bed? I am sure you ought not to stay up much later."

Robert had not waited for any reply from Dolores, but had turned on his heel and walked away when Simone came up; but Dolores, meeting the elder woman's gaze, felt anger, white hot, surge through her veins. She had not known it was possible to hate as she hated Simone, to feel one's hatred wrench and pull at the bridle of self-control, to desire nothing less than instant annihilation for another human being. Yet, remembering Lionel's request, she managed to school her voice to steadiness.

"Very well, Simone. In a few minutes. I must find everybody and say good night."

She watched Simone go off with an impatient partner and was turning away to cross the hall to the stairs, when she came face to face with no other person than her brother, who had just arrived.

"Hullo!" he said. "You have been allowed off the leadin' rein, have you? Where's Simone?"

"Dancing. I'm just going to bed."

"Oh—shall I come and talk to you?"

"Talk to—oh, Nicolas? You don't mean it, do you?"

For all his selfishness he was touched by the joy in her eyes and voice, and laughed a little.

"Certainly, if it means as much to you as all that. Had a good evening?"

"Wonderful!" she lied swiftly. "And I've been closely chaperoned. Are you going in, Nicolas? It's so late you won't have very much time."

"Enough. Cut along and I'll come up in a minute or two."

She smiled down and left him there, and he went through the flower-decked vestibule in search of someone whom he could not at once discover —none other than Robert, whom he found pacing up and down in the moonlight and in no mood for any society, least of all his cousin's.

Hertebury, however, ignored the lack of welcome and halted in front of him.

"Can you give me five minutes?" he said. "I have something I wish to say to you."

"To me?" Robert stared at him. "There is nothing I want to hear."

"I am sorry, but that is nothing to do with it. How long are you staying on the Canal?"

"On the Canal?" Robert echoed. "Till it's finished, of course. Why?"

"And Lionel?"

"Ask him. He doesn't tell me his plans."

"I intend to. May I suggest that you change yours."

"What the hell do you mean?"

Hertebury unmoved, looked at him steadily.

"Think it over," he said, and turning his back limped away.

It was somewhere in the early hours of the morning that Lionel re-entered the hotel and went to his room. He had paced up and down the old sea-wall, relic of the days of the Spanish conquest, trying to form some definite plan of action, but he had ended by seeing the uselessness of all. Simone was what she was. He had learned much this last year, but he had not guessed that her nature would lead her in such by-paths. The commonest decency should have caused her to leave Robert alone—curiously enough, he felt but little anger with his brother. He himself knew only too well the power Simone possessed; Robert would be helpless in her hands, and he had not yielded till driven beyond endurance. Yet, what remained? He could not ignore what he had seen, yet he felt unable to face Simone with the truth. The dry season was over and the sticky heat of the dawn was almost unbearable, as he sat on the side of his bed, haggard and weary-eyed, staring into vacancy, trying to piece together the shattered remnants of his marriage. That he had no proof of Simone's actual infidelity was a fact; but such proof was not needed. The final act was little or

nothing, since it was too evident that only time and place had saved Robert from a shameful sin—she had cast her eyes upon him and the consummation of the embrace that he had witnessed was but a matter of opportunity. Only one thing came clearly from the turgid darkness of his mind, Robert must be saved from this last treachery. Robert, whose honour once lost had been finely redeemed . . . Robert . . . Somewhere about three, he flung himself on his bed and slept heavily for an hour or two, then rose, bathed, shaved, got into his working kit and took his departure to Culebra without seeing Simone.

There, after his hospital work, he had to inspect the oiling of all ditches in an area above the town, and the state of the vegetation near it. One inhabitant, on the edge of the town, had transgressed the sanitary laws by permitting the grass in the garden to grow over a foot high; another had left a rain-barrel unscreened, and, after a house-to-house inspection, Lionel climbed the slope of the hills to look at the bush work.

There, across a stretch of grass-land were parallel, concreted ditches, their sides kept shorn close, and over the water that drained down them from the land was a thin oily film, while here and there, scattered over the land, coloured labourers paced, with a curious can-like contrivance strapped

upon each man's back, from which came a long nozzle, with which he sprayed crude oil upon such swampy places as could not be cleared. In one place some men were at work with burners that atomized oil under high pressure, destroying grass roots with a flame, but for the most part the ditches were cleared and concreted; but higher up where the jungle threatened there were other matters to see to; and Lionel, his thin khaki shirt sticking to his body, his face wet with perspiration, although the sun was behind a bank of sultry clouds, climbed the hill swiftly and reached the place which he had first seen two years ago, paused, and looked back the way he had come.

Behind him the tropical jungle; a fabric of green; impenetrable and dusky, palms, mahogany trees, cocobolo, and a thousand varieties of creepers, vines and great ferns. Here and there the scarlet and yellow of blossoms, or the pale decadence of orchids. Within its shade strange beasts had their being, great snakes like the boa and many tiny, yet more venomous varieties, while insects hummed and beat the humid heavy air with a myriad hurrying wings.

The oppressive silence, the hum of the insects, the sinister density of the jungle, and above, the sultry, tawny sky, with gleams of hazy sunshine penetrating the thunderous clouds; all held a

menace unknown in more northern climes, equalled, perhaps, only in the Congo Forest of Western Africa; and Lionel shivered, aware for the first time that his imagination might make this place a torment to him. Nature here was rotten at the core, dark and festering, even as human life with its sordid desires and ugly sins. He laughed, and the laugh broke in a sob, but he forced emotion fiercely back. There was no time for the weakness of self-pity . . . tears did not help, though the ache of them in his throat was almost unbearable. They were a refuge for hurt children . . . he pressed the palms of his hands against his eyes, shook his shoulders, and with an impatient movement looked down at his feet. All was well. Tiny trickles of water with all vegetation cropped close on their banks meandered down-hill, black water smeared with oily streaks, and where two or three united to form a bigger stream, a rough plank bridged them and on it stood an ash-can.

Nothing heroic to denote heroes' work—just an ugly ordinary ash-can such as might be seen in any great city street every morning, yet that ash-can represented the value of a mighty factor in world-wide commerce. Lionel went down the rough ground to inspect it and found all well. From near its base a piece of lamp-wick hung out, and from that wick every few seconds fell a

drop of blackness, that splashing into the little stream spread its film across the water—a compound of crude carbolic, resin and caustic soda, called by the sanitation department larvacide, which destroyed the larvæ of the mosquito, since that larva could not rise to the surface of the water to breathe when that surface is covered with oily scum.

An utterly irrelevant thought crossed his mind as he inspected the can's work; he must bring Dolores to see this since she was so interested in the fight against fever—both yellow and malarial—and the thought of Dolores brought him once again to last night's scene. Dolores shared with him that shameful memory, Dolores, a young innocent girl had learned, in his care, her first lesson in the ugliness of life . . . what had he said to her . . . what could he say . . . she must go home with Nicolas . . . why had Nicolas come? Was he, too, one of Simone's lovers? A truce to this stupid reiteration . . . there was work to be done . . . he must get control of his thoughts and put his own affairs out of them till the day's work was ended . . . Down the hill he went once again, and received at the hospital a message from one of his inspectors asking him to go straight down to the Cut, and there he found an accident had occurred, and a man had been badly hurt by a fall of rock and earth.

The sight of intense physical suffering and the consequent hours of unremitting endeavour to relieve it, drove his own misery from his mind, and when he returned to his house it was nine o'clock in the evening.

He was physically tired—a rare occurrence with him—he had had no food since a scanty and unwanted lunch; low down in the east and south lightning flickered, almost unceasingly, in the banking clouds, and the air was motionless and stifling. He walked heavily past the screened houses where gay lights and occasionally the strains of music or the sound of laughter suggested family life, and at his own paused, for there were lights there too, and as he came up the steps on to the veranda he saw Simone, Nicolas and Dolores having coffee. So she had returned . . . did she fear he had seen more than she intended, or did she not care? He had not been prepared for this meeting . . . but his nerves had never failed him and they did not fail him now. Deliberately he opened the screen door, stepped on to the veranda and glanced from wife to guest.

"Good evening, Simone—how d'you do, Nicolas? Hullo, Dolores."

Simone rose swiftly, uttered a pleased greeting and would have kissed him, but he put her gently back.

"I'm hot and dirty. I had no idea you were returning to-day."

"I was bored at the hotel—everything was disorganized after the dance. Nicolas is paying us a day or two's visit."

"Indeed?" he glanced swiftly at his cousin. "I'm delighted—if he can put up with the simple life. Can I have some dinner, or is it over?"

"My dear Lionel, of course it's over. I imagined you were having it at Bull's."

Bull's was the eating-house recently opened at Culebra, and frequently, when he was rushed, Lionel lunched there. Now, at Simone's words, he nodded.

"All right. I'll get something there."

"Yes, do. The servants have gone to bed——"

She lit another cigarette and went on talking to Nicolas, and Lionel went indoors across the little hall and into the living-room which faced the other way. He knew he must get some food, and he knew, too, that he must get out of his soiled clothes and have a bath; but just for a moment or two he felt the compelling need of rest, and dropping into a chair he closed his eyes.

He was roused, some ten minutes later, by a touch on his arm, and, looking up, he saw Dolores at his side with a tray.

"I've got you some supper," she said. "It's

not very much; but you look so tired you oughtn't to go out again."

Touched and surprised, he sat up. She had pulled a little table to his side and spread supper for him, and at his silence she spoke again, rather doubtfully:

"You don't mind? You don't think I was interfering?"

"Mind?" he echoed. "Mind? No—I don't mind——"

He dared not trust his voice, fatigue, misery and strain of long hours without food had brought him perilously near going to pieces. Reaching out, he caught her hand and held it for one moment hard against his cheek; then, releasing her, he poured out a stiff whisky and soda, drank it off and began to eat.

Dolores was quite content; he was back and did not resent her looking after him. The dramatic scene, that in her inexperience she had thought must take place, would be non-existent, the crisis was for the time being over, and she was immensely relieved.

She sat by the window, not talking till he was ready for his coffee, and then, as she brought it in, Nicolas came across the hall and stood in the open aperture that connected the lower rooms.

"Hullo, there you are! Dolores playing

ministering angel. Good child. You make that coffee?"

"Um—is it good?"

"Excellent, by the smell of it," Lionel said in his usual voice. "She considered I ought to feed at home, so she fed me."

Nicolas's dark, bitter eyes met Dolores's grey ones in a long, steady stare—a stare so penetrating and strange that the girl faltered and flushed; she did not understand its meaning, and the old discomfort that she had almost always felt in her brother's company returned in double force. Yet the events of these last weeks had developed her, brought her more self-command. She hid her unhappiness and tried to speak coolly, even lightly.

"Why do you stare at me so, Nicolas? I haven't poisoned Lionel."

"Was I staring?" Nicolas gave a queer little laugh and turned to his cousin,

"I hope I am not unwelcome?" he said. "Simone assured me of your hospitality."

"My dear fellow!" Lionel rose hastily. "Of course I'm delighted. I was so surprised to see you all when I came in, and rather fagged, so I was probably not very cordial. A thousand apologies."

"None. We left Robert at his bachelor

quarters. He's looking all-in. Climate too much for him?"

Dolores's fingers, busy collecting the debris of supper, paused in their task for one moment, then resumed their work, and Lionel spoke carelessly.

"Oh, he's all right. Everybody feels it sometimes. It's the humidity."

"Possibly. By the way I'm rejoining the yacht to-morrow. It's tucking me up here, but I wanted to see you all."

"And the work too, I hope."

"And the work. I shan't sail for a couple of days or so, so I may cruise round and come back. Are you going to keep this young sister of mine here for a little?"

"Until we can chaperone her to New York, where Lady Flora can send to meet her," Lionel said, wondering what his cousin had in mind. "We like to have her here and, oddly enough, she likes to stay."

"Oddly? But it's wonderful here!" Dolores exclaimed, breaking into the conversation with all her old enthusiasm. "Nicolas, when they settle the levels and start on the actual building, you must bring me out again. You must!"

"Pity girls cannot be engineers," he said lightly. "Funny child you are, Dolores. Why

don't you want to be with our respected Townley cousins?"

"They bore me unutterably and I'm tired of being bored! They don't want me and I'm tired of not being wanted. They don't care for anything that I care for, or understand the language I talk, and when I am of age, Nicolas, I will not go near them for more than an hour at a time."

"By gad, she means it!" Nicolas said with a surprised laugh. "And she's right. Look here, I've a bargain to propose. I will go off to-morrow and return for you in two months and take you to New York. That will give me time to work out certain plans, and you a little longer on your loved Canal. I will arrange with Aunt Flora and get you home in time for the Court."

"But Simone may——"

"I'll go and talk to Simone now," Nicolas said in rather a peculiar tone. "That is, if Lionel"—he glanced ironically at him—"will permit me?"

Lionel, only anxious to put off any further meeting with his wife as long as possible, assented willingly enough and Nicolas went off, while Dolores put matches and tobacco at Lionel's elbow and took herself to a farther corner, where in the light of a shaded table-lamp she curled up with a book.

For a little while Lionel watched her, half-un-

consciously. He was less exhausted after the meal and was indescribably touched by her thoughtfulness, but he felt unable to rouse himself, and presently he drifted into a sleep of sheer fatigue. As for Nicolas, he went across the hall that was half-sitting-room, half-hall, to the veranda beyond, and there at its end he found Simone where he had left her, a cigarette between her lips, her fair head resting against a cushion.

"So you waited for me?" he said, as he took his place beside her. "That was wise. I've quite a lot to say, and I fancy we shall not be interrupted for a while."

"Indeed?" she glanced at him from beneath heavy lids. "What is it, my dear Nikko? I am waiting."

"That is novel for you. Up to now I have been the one who waited. Listen. I am sailing to-morrow and going away for two months. At the end of that time I am coming back, and when I leave you will leave with me. Do you understand that?"

"I will leave with you?" in spite of herself she could not quite hide her amazement. "What in the world do you mean?"

"Just what I say. You will come with me and we will go to Japan or Honolulu, or where you like. You shall choose."

"Nicolas!" She sat up, her eyes glinting between their narrowed lids. "Are you mad or drunk?"

"Neither. Only tired of your pretence of virtue. I am warning you, and you will come."

"I shall do nothing of the sort. If you cannot be more entertaining than this, I shall go to bed."

He put out his hand to detain her, speaking quietly, yet with a note in his voice she did not like.

"No. I do not think you will do that just yet," he said. "Not till I have finished what I want to say. You remember what I said to you a few days ago? Very well. I am not going to repeat it, but only to tell you that you will come with me, and you will stay with me."

She had conquered her momentary feeling of alarm now, and laughed at him.

"My dear Nicolas, how melodramatic!" she said. "May I ask how you are going to enforce your wishes?"

He was silent a moment, then he looked up at her and there was a smile on his face.

"Do you remember a Captain Pierre Charrefort. Oh! I see you do."

She caught her breath, starting back from him, her eyes wide and horror-stricken.

"Pierre Charrefort is dead. He died eight years ago in Cuba!"

"Did he? I am under the impression he is on board my yacht."

"I tell you it is impossible. Mad! I will tell my husband."

"What will you tell him? That your story to him about your first husband was all lies? That you induced Charrefort to become your lover and ruined him by your extravagance? It will be pleasant telling, won't it?—and Charrefort is on my yacht."

She pressed her hands together, keeping herself outwardly calm, hiding all signs of the consternation in her heart, save the furious beating of a little pulse in her neck. Hertebury watched the little pulse curiously. In his mind, bent so long upon one idea that it was warped and twisted, was the determination to carry out his scheme. No thought of pity restrained him, for he considered Simone had placed herself outside the pale; she was a courtesan as truly as if she had plied her body for public hire, and a courtesan bereft of generosity, of kindliness; he had a supreme contempt for her and at the same time an undying passion. His emotions were warped out of all normal lines in the first place by his bitter resentment of deformity, and he had given all he possessed of feeling to this woman who had treated him with utter heartlessness. His entire mind was now given over

to the one idea, and he was no longer entirely sane, since he had lost all balance or sense of proportion.

Now, he did not wait any longer, concluding rightly that she understood his threat only too well, and going across to her, he took her hand and would have kissed it if she had not snatched it away. The action made him laugh, but he said nothing and went away to find Lionel, and Simone began to pace restlessly up and down the veranda.

CHAPTER XIV

On the brink of the gash that was Culebra Cut Dolores stood in the hot misting rain watching the work below her. Opposite, the hills rose wooded and irregular above the raw sides of the great cut that was being slowly made through this lowest stretch of the Cordilleras.

A narrow-gauge contractor's line ran along a ledge a hundred feet below where she stood, and the uneven, tumbled banks here and there smoked faintly, for the rock in this place was volcanic and heated, giving warning of what lay beneath the Isthmus and its united chains of great volcanoes. Up those steaming sides and in the wide bed of the Cut itself hundreds of men worked now, and thousands would work presently; the clatter and grind of steam-shovels, the rattle of little shunting locomotives, and the roar of fallen earth and rock drowned every other sound, for the chief engineer, Mr. Stevens, was confident that his plan for a lock, or high-level canal, would be carried through, and he had prepared his plans accordingly, but in such a manner that, should the

sea-level canal be adopted, they would need but little alteration.

Already the Cut showed great activity, and on the banks the building of houses, shops, and stores for food was proceeding rapidly, since preparations must now be made for housing and feeding a very large force of men.

To Dolores the delay seemed irksome beyond expression; she wondered how engineers like Robert could bear the suspense and long waiting; but to Robert himself suspense was a thing of the past. He flung himself *now* into the work of each day with a desperate desire to wear himself out, afraid to look one day ahead, no longer thinking or speaking of the months to come. His fight against Simone was a grim struggle with his own desire, and it was showing in his face and the weary lines about his eyes. He was no longer the careless, laughing companion he had been, but a man ceaselessly at war with himself; but for one thing he would have taken Hertebury's hint, resigned from the Canal force and gone back to the States or England.

And curiously, ironically, that one thing was his desire to make such a position possible that he could once and for all remove from his brother's reputation the stain that he himself had put upon it. How, he did not know; no plan seemed feasible, yet

alongside his fight against his passion for Simone was an equally strong and daily-increasing determination to find some way to repay Lionel for the sacrifice he had made.

Of late, the two had drifted apart; his own sense of guilt—since to his tormented mind the very desire for Simone, however much he struggled against it, stained him—kept him from seeking his brother's society; and Lionel was busy with his own work and made no effort to seek Robert. And so, day in day out, the gnawing ache of his desire for Simone wore down his strength, and undermined his powers, both physical and mental.

A shadow, impalpable as all shadows, yet unmistakable, rested over the house; Simone alone appeared untouched by it; but Dolores, painfully awakened to a knowledge she had never before possessed, hyper-sensitive to the mental currents about her, was aware of that obscure yet sombre presence that brooded above them all.

She had seen but little of Lionel since that tragic evening at the Tivoli; he immersed himself in his work and avoided everyone in so far as he could, and her heart ached for him. He looked haggard and grim, and his eyes hid rather than revealed what was passing in his mind. As for Robert, she had not once seen him alone, and the strain began to tell on her also, for she fretted

for both brothers and had to support Simone's uncongenial companionship.

To-day, seeing Robert unexpectedly, she had begged him to show her something of the work, and after the mid-day break he had taken her to a good vantage-point above the Cut as near to the work as possible, pointed out the more interesting details, and left her with the instruction to come down to the place where the steam-shovel was when she was tired of watching other things.

She was young enough to shake off the oppression of the house when out in the open watching the absorbing sight before her, even though a warm rain fell and the hills were misty under clouds tinged with copper and gold. How wonderful to stay out till the great Canal was finished—to watch its slow but sure progress, to see the vast amount of machinery that Robert talked of erected and working—to witness, at long last, the passage of the first ocean-going vessel through the Isthmus of Panama!

The very thought thrilled her; but little did she, or any other spectator of those early years, guess how tragic were to be the days to come, when the opening of that great Canal would pass almost unnoticed—its interest over-shadowed by war.

Presently, wanting to see the work at closer

quarters, she made her way down the rough path Robert had pointed out and stood watching an unloading plough clearing earth and rock off a train of flat cars—a queer piece of machinery that swept all the load clean off the train by means of a broad flange. Dolores was more than half-way down the slope now, and above her the great, roughly-terraced banks sloped, raw and ugly to their summits, and the heat, intense and stifling, brooded almost like a tangible thing over the work and workers. This Culebra Cut she knew, from hearing her cousins talk, would be one of the most tricky if not the most difficult place in the whole length of the Canal. Already slides had occurred, and the heavy rains that fell on almost every day for nine months of the year made the volcanic soil very treacherous.

And Simone would see it all, stay here till the end, watch this gigantic work, be with Lionel —with Lionel. . . . Dolores stopped short on the path, her hands going upwards to her throat.

Lionel would be here and she would go—away to England, thousands of miles, perhaps never to see him again——

So that was it . . . this ache in her throat and at her heart, this wild tenderness, this passion of pity for his suffering . . . it was because she

loved him, because the allegiance she had given him as a child long ago had developed into something deeper and stronger without ever losing its childish loyalty. . . . She felt suddenly tired, as if the self-knowledge that had dawned upon her had taken away all her joyous youth. Because he belonged to Simone, he loved Simone . . . whatever she had done or was doing, Simone was his wife and he would stand by her. Heedless of the rain or damp, Dolores sank down on a mound of earth and leaning her elbows on her knees and her chin on her hands stared out over the misty scene with eyes that were hardly less misty—eyes that saw nothing of the busy activity below and around her, that dwelt only on the memory of a beloved face. . . .

"Hullo, Dolores! Good heavens, you'll be drenched through—get up!"

Robert's dismayed voice recalled her to the present, to herself all damp and muddy, to the realities of everyday life; to the knowledge that in three weeks more she would have said good-bye to Panama, good-bye to this strange little glimpse of another life, good-bye to the man she loved and to whom she meant just nothing at all.

"I'm sorry—I was thinking—I——" she tried to stammer some excuse, but Robert was too quick for her.

"You didn't even hear the six o'clock whistle! Why, Dolores—dear child, what's wrong. You're crying! Dolores!"

He thrust his arm through hers, walking her slowly up the path to keep ahead of men who were swarming up the lower banks on their way to Culebra or to the train, and Dolores, stumbling a little because the tears blinded her, leaned heavily on him.

Anxious, disturbed, he questioned her, but she could give him no answer.

"It's nothing. I don't want to go—I shall miss you all so . . . please, Robert dear . . . believe me. . . ."

"I've never known you cry since you were a tiny girl," he said in a worried voice. "Sweetheart, won't you tell me? I shall understand. I've always understood."

"I can't!" she said miserably. "I hardly know myself, Robert. It's just everything—things are all so crooked, aren't they?"

"Not for you," Robert said sharply, without pausing to think what he was saying, whereat she shook her head, trying to smile.

"For me, too, Robert dear," she said. "As much as for you all. I suppose I was silly just now, but it all seemed such a pity. The mistakes and the unnecessariness of it all."

"Of what all?" he asked. "What do you mean, Dolores? What do you know?"

"Not very much. Only . . . Lionel and Simone are not very happy . . . and neither are you . . . or Nicolas . . . everybody's life seems tangled up."

"I'm happy enough. Good lord, what an imagination you've got!" he exclaimed a little too boisterously, and she looked up at him and shook her head.

"Are you? I don't think so. If only we could all start all over again, Robert!"

He laughed at that, but the laugh was not very sincere, and they traversed the rest of the hill in silence, till at its crest, some fifteen minutes later, Dolores spoke his name.

"Robert!"

"Yes?" he came out of his unhappy thoughts and looked down at her. "What is it? Feeling more cheerful?"

"I've got to, haven't I? Simone mustn't guess. Robert—why do you care so terribly? She doesn't care for Lionel, she wouldn't care for you—or anyone—she couldn't——"

He started violently, wrenching his arm out of hers, staring at her with eyes that blazed.

"What on earth do you mean, Dolores? You're crazy!"

"I'm not. You see I—I was in the garden that night—at the dance——"

He stood rigid and she lied swiftly.

"I was all alone—it was hot. I came out and—and I saw Simone with you."

"You were alone, you say?"

"Yes."

"My God—Dolores—that was all—the only time. I've never touched her—I was mad!"

"No. She was mad. I saw, Robert. You would have left her alone, but she wouldn't have it. She won't leave anyone alone. And you care, don't you?"

He was silent a moment, then began walking on slowly, like a man in a dream.

"Why did you tell me?" he asked at last. "I should never have known."

"I had to—because—because she's not worth it. Nicolas——"

"Nicolas? She's with him again?" Dismayed at the fury of his voice, at the grip with which he shook her arm, she tried to explain—fell silent—understood with a sick sense of despair, and Robert spoke heavily.

"She was Nicolas's mistress for years, I knew it—I've always known it, but it made no difference to me. I'd have loved her whatever she was—whatever she did—but now—now—not with

Lionel. If she had gone to him again—as Lionel's wife—oh God——"

He checked himself and was silent a moment, then spoke more collectedly.

"Has Nicolas been making love to her again?"

"I don't know. Robert, I didn't know what you've just told me. I knew Nicolas cared—years ago, when she married—even though I was only a child, I knew. But I didn't guess it was what you've said. It's too horrible—Nicolas—my brother——"

He could have cursed himself for so hurting her by his loss of self-control, but it was too late; all he could do was to try and help her to face facts as they were, and taking her arm he guided her away from the houses along a stretch of newly-made empty road, pacing slowly till she could recover herself.

"Nicolas is coming back for me next week. He has arranged to take me straight to New York. It must be wrong, what you think, Robert, it must be. He is going right away afterwards to Japan. He told me so."

"When?"

"When he left. He told Simone and Lionel, too. I don't want to go back to England, Robert."

"Don't you? You'd better, Dolores. You'd better get out of all this hideous mess into clean

air. It's damnable you should have got mixed up in it. . . ."

"I suppose I should have had to, sooner or later. Life's like that," she said drearily. "Oh, Robert, I thought it was all so different."

"It is!" Robert said savagely. "Look at Enid and Gaston—and my father and mother—it's only when you find a woman like Simone . . . so beautiful, and yet she's rotten right through . . . she can't help it, perhaps, but she destroys like fire."

"But you love her?" Dolores said wonderingly, and Robert nodded.

"Yes. In a way. I'd die for her—and she's not worth it, Dolores——"

So, woman-like, Simone had the power to make men mad—to spoil their lives—to win a devotion that never came to others. Lionel, Nicolas, Robert —many others probably, but those three out of one small world. It was cruel . . . unfair. . . .

A tangle of perplexity and pain bewildered Dolores, and only one fact emerged clear-cut and salient. Her love for Lionel. Not the love she had seen and heard of these last months, but something infinitely greater, far removed. He would never know or care, but love like hers must be some shelter, some aid, even indirectly . . . it could not be wasted . . . only . . . she was young

enough to long for some outward appreciation, some return for the tenderness and loyalty and affection, that she had felt for him since her childhood, and her courage faltered at the thought of the inevitable parting so near at hand.

The swift dark of the tropics was approaching, and Robert, angry with himself, suggested their return, and as they approached the house which stood at a corner of one of the newly-made, newly-planned roads, they saw Lionel ahead of them walking up from the district hospital; and Robert saw with a pang of wretchedness how his shoulders sagged, how doggedly he walked as if the weight on them of fatigue and mental weariness were almost too great to bear.

He made some abrupt excuse to Dolores and left her, unwilling to face his brother; but all that evening the memory stayed—the sagging shoulders, the tired walk, and for some unknown reason hurt him more than any words could have done. And one woman had done this thing, worn him out, broken his heart, the finest man on earth . . . the man who had sacrificed honour and career to save anyone as worthless as himself, and now he was to sacrifice the remainder of his life for a woman who knew neither loyalty nor gratitude, and he, Robert, who would give his soul to repay his brother, was helpless.

He went to his bedroom in the little hotel where he boarded, and sat in the hot sultry darkness on the side of his bed staring at the pale square of the screened window; and presently the idea he had been seeking came to him. An idea that was so simple, he wondered why he had never thought of it before, yet one that could only be carried out if his suspicions of Nicolas proved to be true. If not—why Lionel must fight out his own life; but, if so, why he, Robert, could take the burden upon his own shoulders and once and for all repay his debt. Sometime in the stifling grey dawn he undressed and fell into a heavy slumber.

CHAPTER XV

Lionel opened his letters, found one addressed to Dolores amongst them, and passed it over.

"Sorry, Dolores," he said. "This was amongst mine—what's wrong?" for Dolores uttered a little exclamation of dismay.

"It's a note—Nicolas. He's here—at Colon."

"Nicolas at Colon? When did he arrive?"

"I don't know."

Roused fully by her tone from his own letters, Lionel looked across at her and saw her lips set in a line that Robert would have known meant a fight against betraying herself. But the look in her eyes as they met his made him realize that something was very wrong, and getting up he went round the little basket breakfast-table and laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Dear, what is it?" he said. "You've not read it."

She passed it to him without a word, and still more puzzled he read it aloud:

"My dear Dolores,

"I am anchoring off Colon for three days, but after all, my plans are changed. I shall not

touch New York, so Lionel must find you another chaperone. Aunt Flora will have you met in Washington, whenever you choose to arrive.

"Yours ever,

"NICOLAS."

"Why, how like——" he was beginning and then stopped, amazed by the sudden radiance in her face, by the sudden grasp of his arm, by her stumbling excited words.

"Then he's not come for me—I needn't go—oh, I needn't go!"

He looked at her strangely.

"Don't you want to go?"

She shook her head.

"No. I want to stay here."

For a moment he was silent, then he released himself very gently and went back to his chair, for he knew she had no knowledge of betrayal in her eyes, of the candid clearness that revealed her heart—nineteen but three weeks ago . . . and loyal and true as steel. He knew her now; she was not the type to change. The child who had loved him at twelve years old, loved him now—and into his own starved heart came a rush of tenderness, a warmth of aching longing to take that love and keep it for his own. He got up again, fetched

a box of matches, lit a cigarette with meticulous care, fighting the sudden longing to let her see what that sweet unconscious revelation meant to him, yet all the while knowing that that was the one thing he could never do. And Dolores, little guessing how that one look had betrayed her, felt a sick sense of having been rebuffed.

"I forgot—you've had me so long. I didn't think——" she began, and realizing what his silence had conveyed to her he spoke quickly.

"My dear, don't be absurd! You know how I—how delightful it is"—he recovered himself quickly—"to have you as long as you can possibly stay. I was surprised that you liked this foul corner of the earth."

"It's—so interesting," she said lamely. "And perhaps Simone won't be pleased."

"Simone will be as pleased as I am," Lionel said with a hardening of his tone. "Nicolas has probably sent a note to her."

Had he been watching her he would have wondered at her sudden pallor at his words, but as it was he was carefully keeping his gaze for his letters, and Dolores's "Oh, yes, I expect so. I hadn't thought of that——" sounded as usual.

He finished his coffee, realized that he must make some plan for her, and spoke in as casual a tone as he could command:

"We'll talk things over later, Dolores. Don't get it into your head Simone doesn't want you. She'll be lonely——"

But Dolores interrupted him. Had he forgotten her presence that night in the garden?

"Simone hates me," she said steadily. "I have ignored it because I knew you made me welcome. But—these last two months—she has pretended better. That's all. And I hate her. I didn't believe I could ever hate anyone, but now I know I can and I do. Lionel—please—as Nicolas can't take me, will you arrange with Mrs. Schofield? She's asked me ever so many times, and I'd love to stay with her."

He closed the double doors again and came slowly back.

"Why do you hate Simone?" he said, and she held her ground and looked at him steadily.

"Because of what she has done to you—and Robert. Please, Lionel, let me go to Mrs. Schofield?"

He made a gesture half of despair, half of impatience.

"Very well," he said abruptly. "I'll arrange it. But you understand it is for your sake only."

She nodded, her eyes searching his with a child's intentness.

"You'll—you'll come and see me? You won't forget I'm there?" she said and the words and the tone had a very youthful wistfulness.

"No," he said, and took her hands in his, holding them. "No. I won't forget you're there." He broke off, leaned down as if he were about to kiss her, checked himself violently, and dropping her hands, strode out of the room.

Meanwhile, in her bedroom, Simone read the note that had come by hand from the yacht *Opal* —a brief note, courteous, correct.

"My dear Simone,—

"As you will see by this I am back again, and the yacht is anchored off Colon. I shall give myself the pleasure of calling upon you about tea-time this afternoon, and perhaps I might hope that you would dine with me either on the yacht or at the Tivoli hotel to-morrow.

"Yours very sincerely,

"Hertebury."

Simone read the note through twice, then placed it on her dressing-table, and let her maid—a young Spanish girl in Madeleine's place—get on with the doing of her hair. There was nothing in the note to cause her dismay, yet she was disquieted . . . she knew Hertebury so well, his

tenacity and his coolness . . . but it was not possible he could carry out his threat. She was not even sure that she had believed him when he spoke of Pierre Charrefort . . . Dolores should be present this afternoon. . . .

At luncheon came a message from Lionel to his wife. Mrs. Schofield's sister was sailing next week for New York and had offered to chaperone Dolores. He had cabled to Lady Flora's friends in Washington and was making all arrangements.

"So it seems you are really leaving us this time," Simone said, looking across the table. "You must be as tired as everybody else of these constant changes."

"Yes, I am," Dolores said quietly. "They have been very disconcerting, and I owe you an apology for them. I have not, unfortunately, been a free agent."

"Very unfortunately," Simone said with some significance. "I should like you to be in to tea to-day as your brother is coming."

"Nicolas? Very well."

That was all, and when Nicolas arrived it was to find Simone very cool and charming and Dolores an unwilling third at the brief interview; but he was equal to the occasion, for he deliberately turned to her just before he was leaving.

"My dear child, I wonder if you would give

me three minutes without your society? I want to speak to Simone privately."

Simone laughed as if the request were the most ordinary in the world, and Dolores got up at once.

"I'll go indoors while you have your mysterious conversation," she said lightly, taking Simone's cue; and when she had gone Nicolas's words were brief.

"Have you decided what you are going to do?"

"What I am going to do? Do you still hold to your ridiculous threat?"

"I do. May I have your answer?"

"Do you need it?" she said carelessly. "No. Of course."

He looked at her steadily for a moment, then bowed.

"So be it. You will dine with me to-morrow?"

"If you wish."

"Thank you. I have invited Captain and Mrs. Rhys from Colon. You will understand that I have not asked your husband because his work makes his company uncertain, and I do not want my *partie carrée* spoiled."

"I quite understand," Simone said, relieved and puzzled, and when he had gone called Dolores.

"Nicolas is absurd!" she said. "As if it needed

your absence to invite me to dinner. I am going on the yacht to-morrow at seven, and Captain and Mrs. Rhys will be with me."

Dolores was relieved at the news; she had dreaded she knew not what, and Simone's manner as much as her words set these doubts at rest. Lionel, too, took the news as a matter of course, and it was not till the next morning when Robert called with a message for his brother that those suspicions were roused once again, and then by Simone herself, who informed him of her evening engagement and suggested that Robert should escort her to Colon.

"Why not let me escort you?" Lionel said with faint irony in his tone. "I rather fail to see why we need trouble Robert."

"You are so uncertain," Simone said sweetly. "Probably someone will be in urgent need of your professional services just at the hour when I want to start. So, if Robert will be so kind."

Hardly conscious of what he did, Robert looked across at Lionel, a look that startled the elder brother in its strange and desperate appeal, and Lionel answering it, as he would always answer any appeal from Robert, nodded almost imperceptibly.

He saw the look of relief in Robert's eyes, heard his: "Very well, Simone. I'll take you to

the dock and deliver you over to the yacht's boat safely," and getting up went to the door.

"I'm walking down to the Cut this morning, Robert," he said. "Care to come with me?"

"Rather—good-bye, Simone; I'll be here on time. See you later, Dolores."

Once outside the house, however, silence fell between them. Robert was ill at ease, yet passionately grateful for Lionel's company, and Lionel for the first time since that tragic night nearly three months ago felt a recrudescence of the old affection for his brother.

It seemed to him as if once again Robert were a young boy, appealing to him for help, and a host of boyhood's memories of adventures, escapes, shared punishments and shared pleasures flashed back into his memory. That scene with Simone took on the complexion of unreality, and the knowledge of Robert's long and unceasing fight, first against the fear that had so nearly wrecked his life, and then against his own passion, reawakened the brotherly loyalty and the love that had always lived deep in his own difficult nature.

Suddenly he thrust his hand within Robert's arm and began to talk, pressing the younger man's arm closely.

"I've good news for you," he said in his customary tone, "and no real right to give it to

you. The levels are decided, and the vote is for a lock canal. I heard privately last night, so keep it to yourself till Stevens makes it known."

Just for the moment all Robert's worries fell from him—the quick caress, the glad news of the work he had so much at heart, and the knowledge that his own belief was justified by the action of higher authorities, swept everything but gladness from him. Stopping short he stared at Lionel almost unbelievingly.

"Good lord, what luck! What splendid luck! Now we can get on—that's the chief—by gad, he's fine!"

"He is. Thought you'd like to know."

"Like to know? I should think so! You couldn't have given me better news. It's damned good of you."

"Nonsense. Why not come back and dine with me alone after you've seen Simone on board? We've not seen much of one another lately."

"I'll be glad to. Very glad. Are you going to be quite alone?"

"Yes. Dolores is to spend the evening with the Caufields. You know young Caufield, don't you? Cousin of Scott Caufield of Boston. His wife has just joined him—about Dolores's age."

"Do you want me to fetch Simone? Or are you going to?"

"I will. Find out what time she wants to leave the yacht. You've quite settled to stay out here now till the end, I hope."

"Yes. That is if I can. I want to see this thing through," and his voice sounded suddenly as odd to Lionel as it did to himself. "It's great that the levels are settled at last. Now the work can begin."

"There'll be plenty to do, and Stevens is the finest chief you could have for getting work done. He's always on the job himself."

The talk drifted on to technical matters, and, when the brothers parted, each to his own work, Lionel felt an immense sense of relief that he had followed his instinct and bridged the gap between them. Tired, sick at heart and incredibly lonely as he found himself, he could attach no blame to Robert, and it was much to have renewed the old terms between them. The barrier that had been between them seemed to have been demolished with such ease and simplicity, that he wondered contemptuously at its existence at all. That one hardly-conscious signal for help had washed away both the memory of Siboney and the memory of the garden at Panama—not that Robert had not long ago vindicated himself on the former count. His deliberate walking into danger and his endurance of both risk and hardship had wiped all

stigma from his character in his brother's eyes, though not till this hot summer morning did Lionel fully realize the fact.

It occurred to him, as he walked up to the hospital, that Robert was not looking well—he was drawn and haggard, his eyes had the red, inflamed look of one not sleeping, and his movements were jerky, as if his nerves gave him trouble . . . he must get him to submit to an examination. This wasn't the place to play tricks with your health . . . if he was ill he'd have to go home . . . no monkeying with the Isthmus and its climate for a man out of condition. Go home . . . that would leave him alone with Simone . . . Robert gone . . . Dolores gone.

He jerked up his thoughts on the curb. No thinking of Dolores, no dwelling on that amazing truth he had seen in her face . . . all that was over for him . . . but how safely a man might trust his future and his heart to her; young as she was she would take both and cherish them and guard them and make heaven for him. . . . He brushed his hand impatiently over his eyes and forehead, and quickening his steps reached the hospital and his work.

All day, through the stifling heat amidst the mud and flying dust from blasting, the memory of that brief walk stayed with Robert. He worked

with feverish energy, disregarding the headache that for weeks had been troubling him, careless of heat, although once or twice he felt dizzy; thinking only of his brother, and as the hours passed that resolve taken in his bedroom weeks ago deepened and strengthened. To-night he would know—to-night he would be sure—and when he was sure he could repay that long-standing debt. The way might be a little difficult, but he would find it—straightening his back he glanced round the scene about him. The horde of men working on the excavation, the great steam shovels eating away the banks, the noisy little engines puffing along the contractor's lines, the roar of tons of earth falling, the clatter of machinery—pulling the teeth of the tropics—fighting Nature and winning—it was a fine thing to be part of it! A splendid work to have helped, ever so humbly, on its way. A pity he should not see the triumphant finish—a pity things could not wait—but he had owed that debt long enough. Damn his head—he wished that raw earth, sky, and hillside would not swing so drunkenly about him.

Dolores, as usual, coming to watch the work late in the afternoon found him when the syren blew at six o'clock, since there was a compact between them to meet at one particular spot, and seeing him she exclaimed sharply:

"Robert! You look so strange," she said. "What is it? Are you ill?"

"No. Not a bit. It's damn' hot down there, that's all. I hear you are going to the Caufields for the evening."

"Yes. Isn't it fun? Daisy Caufield was one of Clara's friends. My cousin, Clara Townley, you know. She was nice—much jollier than Clara. Robert! I'm sure you're not well. You're even walking unsteadily!"

"My dear kidlet, shut up! I'm hot and tired and I want a drink——" he broke off and laughed. "Dives and Lazarus—oh, well, I'll know what it's like. Water—perhaps they'll let me off lightly."

"What are you talking about?" she demanded, and again he laughed.

"Nothing of importance. A man should always pay his debts, shouldn't he, Dolores?

"Why, of course. Always. Why?"

"Nothing. I'm glad you said that. Remember it, will you?"

"I don't understand you a bit this evening!" Dolores said in an exasperated voice. "You are talking nonsense," and on that note they parted at the corner by Robert's bachelor quarters.

CHAPTER XVI

The clear light of a full moon lay over the sea, touching the long slow rollers with silver, glittering on the snowy sides of the *Opal* as she lay at anchor, till she looked like a dream-ship so white and delicate in a sea of argent and sapphire. The low sound of the surf was never ceasing, but the night was very still; there was no wind, and in the lee shadow of the *Opal's* side a small boat rocked gently on the swell.

The deck was deserted save for the man on watch, and it had not been too difficult for Robert with his agility and strength to board the yacht and hide himself in the deepest shadow; for, as he had guessed, Captain and Mrs. Rhys had not arrived and Simone had dined alone with Nicolas.

He had bidden her farewell on the wharf when she entered the yacht's launch, had said Lionel would fetch her back at half-past ten and see her safely to the hotel, where she would stay the night since there was no way for her to get back to Culebra. And fate had played into his hands. Believing the Rhys husband and wife to

be with Simone, Lionel had felt no qualm about sending Robert into temptation when he was summoned summarily to a confinement; and Robert, not knowing then that Captain and Mrs. Rhys had not been asked to dinner that night at all, but the next, had gone without apprehension to fetch Simone—had gone out on a hired boat to the yacht, been told that his Grace was bringing the lady on shore himself, and had left —to return again in the darkness before the moon rose and to climb on board unobserved.

He had waited, cramped and motionless, till after ten-thirty, and now, his brain almost painfully clear and his nerves taut, he set himself to a perilous task.

He knew where Hertebury's private staterooms were—that the yacht's port-holes on the starboard side were in black shadow. Dropping noiselessly into the boat he pulled round, saw the lights and felt about for a rope he had already fastened above. There it was—let the boat drift —he could catch her in a few moments—swinging himself up he climbed the rope, and fending himself off the side with one hand, peered through the window into the lighted cabin.

* * * * *

Sunday morning, thirty-six hours later, a day of blazing sultry heat, no whit relieved by the

occasional downpours of thunder-rain; Simone, exhausted by the heat, desirous of getting as far as possible from Colon and the lovely vision of the *Opal* poised like a great white bird on a sea of brass, had suggested the Tivoli hotel for herself and Dolores for the week-end, and though Lionel could not leave, he had gladly acquiesced. The absence of the two would give him a chance to see Robert again alone and insist on examining him, for Robert was behaving oddly; he had not seen him since that evening they had spent so happily together, but two men had reported that he seemed highly excited and was acting strangely and drinking too much. That would not do . . . something must certainly be wrong; and it was disconcerting to find, when he arrived at Robert's quarters, that Robert was not there.

He went back to his own house, uneasy, he did not know why. Robert had said he should be in Culebra all the week, yet he had left without leaving any message. The *Opal* was still at anchor, and Nicolas he knew was on board; oddly disquieted, he retraced his steps to the club-like bachelor quarters, and by a few discreet questions found that Cather had seen Robert go off on a light engine to Panama. Matters were not improved when he added:

"If I were you I'd look after him—make him

lie up. He's all to pieces, nerves gone to the devil —this morning he looked like nothing on earth."

"Ill?"

"I don't know. No. Not exactly ill. Strange rather—he's been odd for days—weeks—told me he wasn't sleeping well." Sleeplessness in this damp heat—days of unremitting work, nights of gasping wakefulness and desire tearing at the exhausted body and racking the tired mind. . . . For the first time Lionel realized that even his passion for his wife, so hard dying, was dead—that henceforth she had no power over him; she herself had killed first his love and then his desire, and he felt the first throb of active bitter anger awaken in his heart, as deep anxiety and fear awakened for his brother's well-being.

He gave Cather some vague answer and turned back to his house. There was plenty of work waiting, even for a quiet Sunday, and he forced himself to do it; yet, as the day passed, his uneasiness grew and strengthened, and when about five o'clock the Japanese manservant brought his tea to the veranda, he drank a cup hastily and then began pacing up and down. A light engine—what right had Robert to take an engine and go to Panama? And why had he done so strange a thing when he had said only the previous Friday he was staying at Culebra?

Even though his anxiety was growing, Lionel did not fear Robert's loyalty in going to Panama when Simone had gone there—he was to thank God afterwards that no unworthy suspicion had entered his mind.

He was getting ready to go to the hospital about half-past six when a telegram arrived, brought by a grinning negro; and as he held the envelope in his hands a cold hand seemed to grip his hand, a certainty of tragedy so definite that for a second he could not open the paper, then forcing himself to tear the envelope he read the words of the message with absolute calmness:

"Serious accident. Come Tivoli Hotel immediately.

"SCHOFIELD."

CHAPTER XVII

Robert hardly knew how he got back to his boat and the boat back to the shore, yet somehow he found himself in his room at the Santa Teresa hotel—a place little more than an inn.

He called loudly for a drink and gulped down some raw and fiery spirits, never even heeding what the coloured waiter brought him, and then, steadied a little, went up to his room and tearing off his clothes sat down on his bed. Here, where the ocean breeze did not penetrate, it was suffocatingly hot and his skin was wet with perspiration and his broad chest laboured. It was necessary to keep his brain clear, yet how to do it he hardly knew, for the pain was more acute this evening, and the shock of his suspicions becoming a certainty had seemed to increase it. At first rage, then horror filled his mind, but gradually out of the welter of both one thought emerged, the necessity of repaying his debt to his brother, and the way in which it must be accomplished.

All night till the dawn had fully broken he sat there, then fell into a heavy slumber and awoke

about eight o'clock, quite clear-headed, with his mind fully made up. He took a bath, dressed and reported for duty, worked through till mid-day and then, avoiding any possibility of meeting either Simone or Lionel, went to his own quarters and spent a couple of hours answering necessary letters, destroying others, paying bills and settling his affairs generally; and it was while he was there that Lionel's note arrived saying Simone and Dolores had gone to Panama and he should hope to see Robert for the Sunday.

Robert read the note twice and at the end his sight blurred, for Lionel had scrawled an unusual ending:

> "My love to you, dear old chap, now and always.—LIONEL."

He had never before said so much and for a minute all the torments and confusion cleared from Robert's mind, and he was sane and normal, and eager for that brother's company; then the dark cloud settled once more upon his mind, even as the knowledge of the hateful power Simone had over him swept upon his tormented brain—of his debt that no words or expression of affection could wipe out—and suddenly the whole way opened before him.

Early the next morning he took French leave in the use of a light shunting engine, since there was only one train each way on Sundays, went to Panama, and about noon made his way to the Tivoli Hotel and inquired for Simone. Yes. She was there—and he thereupon went to the writing-room and wrote two letters. The first was lengthy and he sealed it and addressed it to Colonel Crawford, marking it "strictly private;" the other was to Simone, and that he sent up by hand to her sitting-room.

Dolores had gone into the garden, and Simone was alone when she read it and smiling, sent, after a minute or two's reflection, an answer back. Robert had informed her that he was at the Tivoli, that he would adore to take her out in the little launch belonging to Señor Esteban, when the heat of midday was past.

"Don't bring Dolores," he had written. "I want just you alone," and he had known that those words would bring her—as they did.

About half-past three, Robert, standing easily in the gently-rocking launch, held out his hand to assist Simone, and Simone smiling faintly took it, stepped into the boat and settled herself under the awning. It was quite fine and the prospect of a few miles' run on the ocean was the most agreeable way of spending the hot hours before sunset;

and Robert had capitulated at last. That fact pleased and soothed her, for he had been the only man to resist her and not until to-day had she forgiven him; not quite even yet perhaps. It depended on the outcome of this little excursion. Now, as the engine churned up the water, she looked at him faintly amused.

"You are not bringing a man?"

Robert shook his head, but did not look at her.

"No. I can manage this boat. A man would be in the way."

Simone's smile touched her lips.

"Would he? How very interesting the prospect sounds—can a prospect sound, by the way? Of course not! Where are we going?"

Robert, intent on the steering, answered vaguely, and Simone was quite content to lie back on the cushions feeling the welcome sea-breeze on her face, and the occasional touch of spray as the launch sped seaward.

The engine was a good one, and when Simone roused herself from her pleasant siesta it was with some amazement that she saw the islands away to the stern and the open blue of the Pacific all around her; Robert was leaning a little forward, his face intent, his eyes fixed on some distant goal, and after a moment she spoke:

'Why, Robert—we're several miles out. Hadn't we better be turning back?"

At the sound of her voice, Robert's gaze left the horizon and came back to her, and as her eyes met his, she realized with something of a shock, that he was looking very strange, pale, determined, yet with an expression she did not understand. As he did not answer, she spoke again, more imperatively.

"Robert! We ought to turn back. We have gone far enough."

He made no attempt to alter the direction of the boat and he did not speak, and for the first time a little pang of apprehension shot through her, to be banished instantly, however, since before all else she was a fearless woman.

"Robert—did you hear what I said? It's half-past five—let us turn back. I'm tired of the sea."

As if he made a great effort, he spoke slowly:

"We are not going back."

"Not going—not going back?" straightening herself she sat upright, looking at him sharply. "My dear Robert, are you proposing to elope with me in this power-boat?"

"No," he said again in that slow, heavy way, and impatient, incredulous, beginning in spite of herself to be afraid, she spoke again:

"I do not know what you mean. Of course, we are going back and at once. My dear Robert, you are being melodramatic."

"Am I?" his eyes, curiously intent and impersonal, their pupils shrunk almost to a pin-point, met hers. "Perhaps. I was wrong when I said we were not going back at all. We are. Part of the way."

He suited the action to his words by a twist of the wheel that brought the fast-travelling boat round at a terrific angle, but Simone made no protest. This was a Robert she did not know, and she was uneasy.

"Part of the way? Where?" she demanded; and he looked at her again.

"Half a mile off Flamenco"—he named one of the islands in the bay—"there is a reef that is out of the fairway and just below the surface. When we get near enough for the current to drift us on, I am going to put the engine out of action."

For a moment, as he ceased speaking, she stared at him, the colour draining out of her face, then as the truth dawned on her she pressed her hands over her mouth to stifle the cry of horror . . . but after that first instant, she got herself in hand, and spoke with reasonable steadiness:

"You mean to wreck the boat?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I owe a debt," Robert said very distinctly. "And this is the only way I can pay it. When you are dead, Lionel will be free."

She clenched her hands fiercely, gave one swift look around and realized her helplessness—the long blue swells were empty of sail or steamer, the land lay like a dark hilly shadow to the east and northward, and the rounded summit of Flamenco Island was between them and the mainland. Above them the sky, around them the ocean. Her brain felt numbed, yet she forced herself to outward calmness, knowing now that she had to deal with a man no longer sane, and leaving her seat she moved nearer to him, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Robert—don't try to frighten me by saying these dreadful things. It is horrible of you"—and then some evil genius prompting her—"I thought you loved me."

He turned his head a little away from her, his sombre gaze seeking once more the distant horizon.

"I do," he said. "And that is why I am going with you. I must kill you for what you have done to my brother. But I am being very kind—we are going out together."

"Going—out?"

"Yes. Oh, I have been very careful. It will look like an accident—but you must not live any longer to wreck more men's lives—and I owe mine to Lionel, so I am paying my debt. Do you mind letting go my arm? There is a valve I must open."

Automatically her fingers loosened, and like one in whom all power of movement is paralysed she watched him doing something—she did not know what—to the engine; plainly as he had spoken she could not yet believe that there was absolutely no way of escape. All her life she had controlled circumstances, and it was unbelievable that she was now powerless in her extremity. But as he straightened himself, looking intently ahead, the pulse of the engine began to slow, and the realization was borne in upon her that this was no dream, no dramatic situation, but the verge of a disaster so absolute that it could but end in death—and at that realization her nerve broke and she clutched at him, shaking his arm with fierce insistence.

"Robert! Robert! Don't do it—oh God—listen—you're mad——"

He turned his head and looked down at her, and her cries died away to silence . . . it was useless . . . only the surf creaming gently over the hidden reef and the wheeling sea-birds heard her . . . clenching her hands against her lips

she gazed with staring eyes up to the unanswering heavens, felt the boat swerve, jar, then grind sickeningly upon the rock, and Robert looked at her smiling.

"It will soon be over," he said, with a calm more dreadful than any emotion. "Sit still—I shall be with you and I love you——"

"Love me—Robert, for God's sake——"

'You and I have had nothing to do with God —but in a few minutes we shall know all about Him, I—" breaking off his speech he leaned down to see how fast the boat was settling and one last moment of sanity flared across his brain.

"Don't be afraid—it will soon be over"— he took her hand, unresisting now, and ice-cold. "This will pay your debt as well as mine—see— I'll hold you—close——"

CHAPTER XVIII

A FAINT breeze crept across the bay of Panama, ruffling the leaves of the palms, stirring the muslin curtains of a room in Ancon Hospital inside the wire screening; in between storms the sun shone, waking to brilliance the flowers and leaves. Only at the threshold of that room had the daily life of Nature paused and a more majestic presence taken its place.

The thin little curtains were drawn, but the sunlight streamed through them and as Lionel closed the door behind him, he had a momentary impression of a blaze of golden light that was dazzling; then his eyes grew accustomed to the scene, and he went across the room to the bier that stood in the centre, with candles burning at the head and foot.

A nun knelt in one corner of the room, shapeless, impersonal, in her flowing black robes, but at Lionel's request she rose and left him, and when the door had closed behind her he went across to the bier and looked upon the face of his brother.

No sign of the agony of death, of the struggle that must have preceded the final despair was visible on Robert's face—a purple bruise high on the forehead was hidden by his hair, and all the ravaged lines the last two years had written on his face were smoothed away. Death had brought back to him his beauty and gaiety—in some strange mystery Death seemed to have brought back his life, for he smiled as he lay there, a smile that curved his lips and surely shone behind the closed lids; and as Lionel stood there, fixing in his memory the beloved features he would never see again, the icy control that had been his since he had heard the news wavered.

He bent over Robert and kissed him, blinded by tears, and fell on his knees by the coffin, his arms stretched across it . . . and all the memories of his anger, his harshness, his contempt, flooded back upon his soul in a wave of unavailing remorse.

And it was there that Dolores, not knowing where he was, found him half an hour later, when she came in, flowers in her arms to lay in the coffin before it was closed; and seeing him she hesitated, not knowing whether to go or stay. She had not seen him for all the past dreadful thirty-six hours, except for a few brief moments in Colonel Crawford's company, and now she had a very natural

delicacy in intruding upon him. With all her heart she longed to have the right to comfort him, but she withdrew, closing the door after her, and not till she knew he had gone back to the hotel, did she venture to lay the flowers at Robert's feet.

Later, she found him in the sitting-room belonging to Mrs. Schofield, with whom she had been stopping. He was very tired, yet he knew there were things he must face, knowledge he must possess, and after a little he roused himself, and getting up went over to the table to get some papers that needed his attention, when the door opened and Dolores came in.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you, but I wanted to tell you that to-morrow Nicolas is taking me back," she said. "I'm to join him on the yacht. I knew you were here, so I came from Mrs. Schofield's to say good-bye."

He laid the papers down again and looked at her.

"I am glad Nicolas has come to his senses," he said after a moment and forced himself to think of practical things. "But New York—what about your journey to England?"

"Mrs. Godstone, Aunt Flora's friend, is to meet us. Here's her cable."

She held out the slip, Lionel read it and handed it back.

"That's quite satisfactory. I——" he paused a moment, then added curtly: "I am more than sorry you have had such an end to your visit . . . it's a good thing you are going at once."

Dolores folded the cablegram with immense care. She was terribly afraid she might lose her self-control and was quite unable to speak. She could hardly believe that this stranger was Lionel, this man who spoke so formally, who quite evidently cared nothing at all whether she went or stayed. She felt as though someone had struck her a blow, stunning her power of speech, yet leaving her conscious of pain that seared. This was the last time she would see him—the last time—aware that this silence could not continue, knowing that she could not trust herself, she held out her hand.

"I'd better say good-bye. I—I've got to pack—we're leaving early——"

"Good-bye, Dolores. Tell Nicolas I am sending him a note."

And that was all, a handshake, hardly a look, and she was out in the passage, and he had not even troubled to find out if she were walking or driving, or if she needed an escort back to Mrs.

Schofield's house. Till she was in the little bedroom she kept steady, but then, locking the door she broke into bitter weeping; the heart-broken sobbing of the childhood she had not long left behind her, whose child's dream has been shattered for ever.

The funeral was in the afternoon—only one coffin, for Simone's body had not yet been found, and among the crowds that attended it she had eyes only for one man who went through the service unmoved, with set jaw and cold, hard eyes. To her, the end of her world had come and she suffered the utter desolation of the very young.

Despite the tragedy of his personal affairs, Lionel had work that must be done, and he intended to go straight back to Culebra directly the service was over and give himself over to the accumulated tasks that awaited him; but as he walked away from the hillside cemetery, Colonel Crawford came up to him.

"Captain Kent," he said, "I have something I want to say to you. Can you give me a few minutes in my office before you leave?"

Lionel stopped abruptly.

"Something to say to me? Anything wrong, sir?"

"Nothing. It is a purely personal not a professional matter. We will walk up together."

The exertion of climbing the slope to Ancon Hospital in the hot afternoon sun was welcome and proved an excuse for silence, and it was not till the two men were in his private office that Colonel Crawford spoke.

"Kent," he said, "I want to tell you that certain information has come to me. You remember the first time we met?"

A dull flush rose to Lionel's cheek-bones, he nodded, and Crawford went on:

"On Sunday morning your brother wrote a letter to me. In it he said that he was leaving the work on the Canal and intended returning to England. That being so he wished to tell me the truth of that affair at Siboney. No—wait!"—for Lionel's unnatural calm was breaking and he had uttered a violent exclamation. "He felt justified, since you and he were no longer to work together, in breaking the silence you had imposed upon him, and relieving himself of a burden of remorse. His career in the army was finished and your self-sacrifice was therefore no longer a necessity. He said that he intended to leave that very evening on a boat, sailing at daybreak, a Portugese trader then at anchor off Panama, and he left a note for me to give you. Here it is."

With shaking hands Lionel took the paper Crawford held out, and as he began to read it the

elder man turned away and going to the window, stood looking out.

It was brief and scribbled in pencil, but as Lionel read, the tears blinded him.

"DEAR OLD MAN,—

"I've broken my word and told the Colonel. There's no reason under heaven why you should be under that shadow any longer. You've never let me thank you and perhaps you will hate me for this, but I had to do it.

"I'm off to-night. Better not risk meeting you again just yet. One thing more—I was a coward and a beast to let you bear that for me all these years, but I've been straight to you since. Remember that. It's true, whatever circumstances looked like.

"Till we meet again,

"ROBERT."

"Till we meet again"—Lionel crushed the note against his mouth and covered his face, and presently Crawford came over to him and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"My dear lad," he said, and his tone went to the heart of the other man, "there are no words

to help you in your grief, but I want you to know how proud I am of having so gallant a gentleman to serve under me."

Lionel's hand groped for the elder man's and gripped it hard, and when at last he regained his self-control and looked up, he was alone.

It was nearly an hour later before he left for Culebra, and as he was jolted along the line he looked out on the work about him, like a man who sees his world for the first time. Grief for his brother would be an abiding thing, bitter regret for the failure of his marriage and for the woman whose heartlessness might have been changed had he been more understanding, or more patient; but through these emotions permeated a great and vital relief—the shadow that for years had brooded upon him was lifted. The one man whose good opinion he valued and coveted knew the truth, and a wave of thankfulness rose in his heart . . . and alone in his private room at Ancon Hospital, Colonel Crawford read through, once again, the last paragraph of the letter Robert had written to him; read it and burned it to a little heap of ash.

> "By the time you have got this it will be over. I have been very careful. No one but you will ever know it was not an accident, and

I trust you to keep my secret. I suppose I am mad—my head won't let me think of anything but paying my debt. I love her, but she has never loved me or Lionel, or anyone but herself. Pray for me.

"Robert Kent."

CHAPTER XIX

On the quay at Colon, where she had watched Robert superintending the unloading of machinery only a few months ago, Dolores stood, watching the distant *Opal* lying at anchor still, but with smoke issuing from her funnels preparatory to her departure.

Mrs. Schofield was seated on the veranda of the hotel, but Dolores, unable to keep still, driven by a restlessness so overwhelming that it seemed like a physical torment, had left her and gone to the quay, heedless of the heat, knowing the yacht's boat would not be in for fifteen or twenty minutes, conscious that she must be alone, fearing that she should go mad if she had to listen to her kindly hostess's talk any longer.,

Her keen young sight could see the launch putting off from the yacht's gleaming white sides and starting on its mile-trip across a sea that glittered under a brassy sky, and she clenched her hands against her mouth to stifle a sob. She could not go like this—she could not—she—a

voice spoke her name and she wheeled round, her hands dropping, the colour draining out of her face, to see Lionel at her side.

"You—you——" she was stammering, trembling; and he took her hands in his and held them closely against his breast.

"I had to come," he said. "Forgive me for yesterday—Dolores—my dear—my dear——"

He broke off looking down into her eyes, and at the expression in his own, at the sudden break in his voice, the misery and despair and frantic longing, melted in her heart and she smiled.

"I couldn't have borne it if you hadn't come," she said very simply. "You knew that?"

He bent his head in assent, his eyes never leaving hers.

"Yes. Neither could I. My leave is due in the spring and I shall come over to England. You'll be there? You'll come back with me? You understand?"

She could not speak, but she nodded and a lovely faint colour crept to her cheeks.

"I can't say what I want to you—not now—not yet—you'll wait, Dolores?"

"All my life!" she said very softly. "The boat is here. Will you kiss me—just once?"

She saw the glitter in his eyes, the setting of

the flat muscles of his jaw, then still holding her hands he bent down and kissed her—a gesture that in this place of farewells was unremarkable, and with the pressure still on her lips and the memory in her heart, she let him hand her down into the boat.

Made and Printed in Great Britain by
The Greycaine Book Manufacturing Company Limited, Watford
F150.827